Polish Jewish Relations: an in-depth look at the March of the Living

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Introduction

For almost one thousand years, Poles and Jews were able to coexist as neighbors. Although the relationship was often strained, the two groups were largely able to tolerate each other. After the end of World War II, the neighbor paradigm was no longer applicable: Polish Jewry had been destroyed and most of those that remained chose to emigrate. But there was more that changed in this relationship apart from geographic proximity. Since 1945 Jews have eyed Poles with suspicion and even contempt—they were collaborators during the Holocaust. Poles have mostly rejected this interpretation and instead have seen themselves as victims of Nazi Germany on par with Jews.

This paper seeks to understand how these two groups see each other. I have chosen to focus on a particular program that places Jewish teenagers in the heart of Poland. This program, called The March of the Living, has been controversial since its inception in the 1980's. The trip brings several thousand 11th and 12th grade students to Poland for one week before visiting Israel for the second half of the program.[1] While in Poland, the students see almost exclusively ghettos, concentration camps, and mass graves. The highlight of the trip is a three-kilometer march in Auschwitz meant to symbolize Jewish survival of the Holocaust.

Proponents of the trip argue that it is the Jewish community's responsibility to present detailed, first-hand accounts of Nazi atrocities so that Jews never forget. They also argue—and research has shown—that participants feel a stronger bond toward their religion after attending the trip. This cannot be underestimated as demographics illustrate that fewer and fewer people are choosing to remain Jewish (National Jewish Population

[1] The numbers vary by year but usually fall within the range of 4,000-6,000 Jewish students from around the world, with the largest group being from North America.

Survey). Critics of the trip contend that it manipulates the minds of young teenagers and teaches them to see the world with an "us versus them" mentality. In particular, these students are likely to see Poles as anti-Semitic.

This project began with the question: What, if any, impact does The March of the Living have both on how Jews view Polish citizens *and* how Polish citizens view Jews? I have designed my research not only to study the opinions of participants in the March, but also to assess the institutional views that are conveyed to them by the organizers of the March. My research is based on personal interviews with approximately 20 people. I spoke with several teenagers from Columbus, Ohio who went on the March in the Spring of 2004. I asked them questions designed to assess not only their opinions of Poles, but also what their *leaders* told them about Poles.[2] I wanted to gauge the influence of their chaperones and also the materials produced by the March of the Living—everything from glossy brochures advertising the trip to study guides given to participants several months before their departure. In addition, I spoke with two people who help run the program: a local group leader who accompanied her students from Columbus, and a rabbi who serves as a regional leader responsible for over 100 students.

The other half of my research focused on Polish views toward these students. I traveled to Poland in December 2004 to meet with residents of Oswiecim— a small town that is better known by its Germanic name: Auschwitz.[3] With the help of a translator I spoke with people on the street in the town's center, a 15 minute walk from the Auschwitz I complex, regarding what they thought about these Jewish students, and

[2] See the Appendix for a full list of all interview questions as well as individual responses.
[3] Oswiecim is pronounced "Osh-VEEN-chim"

about Jews in general. [4] Along with the March of the Living, other groups, such as Israeli school children, come throughout the year. The March, along with these other group excursions, leave a distinct impression on the town due to their size and security requirements. When talking with residents, all were very familiar with the trip.

Participants preparing for the March are warned to expect acts of anti-Semitism while in Poland and especially while marching through Oswiecim. News articles show that this is not overly cautious: students, especially during the 1990's, *have* been jeered at, taunted, and occasionally assaulted while in Poland. I wanted to know whether this was the work of a few, or whether such actions reflected the views of Poles more generally. And even if most Poles drew the line with physical assault, did they still feel the Jews should not be in their community?

Finally, I spoke with Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, a professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Her work as a sociologist inspired her to study the March of the Living. Despite being a practicing Catholic, she has taken an interest in Jewish studies and is, by all accounts, an expert on the March. Since she has worked closely with both sides, her insight was invaluable to understanding the dichotomy between the two groups.

This paper relies on ethnography for its results. Available survey data have been utilized where appropriate, but I have mostly used my recorded discussions as evidence for my conclusions. John Van Maanen writes, "It is, by and large, the ethnographer's direct personal contact with others that is honored by readers as providing a particularly sound basis for reliable knowledge" (Maanen 3). In his attempt to define ethnography,

[4] Auschwitz is actually made up of several camps, with the two largest being Auschwitz I (with the famous "Arbeit Macht Frei" gate) and Auschwitz II or Birkenau which was the site of mass extermination. Though there are houses literally overlooking the railroad trestle, Birkenau lies at the edge of the town and is largely isolated geographically from most residents. Auschwitz I is more centrally-located; it is also much smaller, and lies on a busy street about one half mile from the railroad station.

Nigel Fielding adds, "…ethnography always involves the study of behavior in 'natural settings,' as opposed to the experimental settings of psychology. Further, it is committed to the idea that an adequate knowledge of social behavior cannot be fully grasped until the researcher has understood the 'symbolic world' in which people live" (Gilbert 157). This paper emphasizes the qualitative over the quantitative when trying to understand the emotions and cognitive beliefs of both groups. It presents the opinions and beliefs of relatively few people, but it does so in a way that allows the reader to better understand them. There is, of course, no guarantee—aside from the survey research of others—that the views expressed in this paper are representative of all Jewish teenagers or all residents of Oswiecim. Despite this, this ethnographic study presents information that can help us understand the reciprocal views of a typical person in one of the two groups.

After compiling my research, I have reached several conclusions. Perhaps most surprising is that the "widespread" Polish anti-Semitism feared by Jews is largely a myth. The findings of this paper cannot be used to argue it does not exist—and I doubt anyone could argue such a thing. Rather, I can show that the notion that *all* or even most Poles have negative attitudes toward Jews is simply not true.

From talking with the Jewish students, I found that the March of the Living does portray both Poland and Poles negatively. This is a result of they way in which the organizers of the March have framed information provided in promotional and study materials. In several cases, the same (negative) opinions provided by the March correlated with opinions given by the Marchers. It is important to note that not all participants saw Poland in a negative light after the trip—several even expressed their desire to return to see the country. Also, it is doubtful the March intentionally seeks to

"vilify" the country. Rather, it is likely that in order to reach its goal of emotionally affecting these students, Poland is portrayed as a place of great sadness which is then contrasted with Israel—the land of milk and honey. Even if this might be irresponsible, I found no evidence that it is malicious.

It is unclear how Jews and Poles will view each other in the future. Now that they are no longer neighbors, it is possible for the two groups to ignore each other save perhaps for their "interaction" (or lack there of) at Auschwitz and the dozens of other sites throughout the Polish countryside. It is up to members of both groups to decide whether the relationship of the past is worth understanding because Polish-Jewish history is centuries old and inextricably intertwined. This paper presents the views of the two groups—both toward the other and of itself—in the hope of providing a better understanding of the issues at hand.

Auschwitz and the Politics of Memory

The relationship between Poles and Jews has never been particularly warm. Although the two groups coexisted for centuries in what is now Poland, anti-Semitism was never far from hand. This is not to say Jews were oppressed—on the whole Poland was a far better country for Jews than most of Europe. Nonetheless, memories of this distant past appear to fuel much of the perceived anti-Semitism that Jews speak about when referring to the current relationship.

Since the end of World War II, both Poles and Jews have "adopted" Auschwitz as a memorial for the suffering of their respective groups. The politics of remembrance have indeed taken root in this small, otherwise anonymous town. The camp was the site of

extermination not only for Jews, but also for Polish citizens. If there is any description that can characterize the last 50 years of Auschwitz's history, it is the unwillingness to share the site. This was exacerbated further by the Soviet desire to rid Auschwitz—and its victims—of any religious identification. Indeed, until 1989 the camp remained void of any mention of Jewish tragedy. As Lawrence Blum writes, "the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum was entirely inadequate to its universalist challenge…There was little recognition of the distinctive fate of Jews and Gypsies/Roma as ethnic groups slated for extermination" (Blum, 132). He further claims that, "…one would not have recognized that genocide of Jews had taken place [at Auschwitz] unless one already knew it" (133). Thus it is understandable that the Jewish community had reason for complaint regarding the site where approximately one million Jews were murdered (Rozett and Spector).

Poles see the camp as a symbol of Nazi oppression of their countrymen. According to a Newsweek article, "Of the 150,000 Polish prisoners who were sent to Auschwitz, about 75,000 died there" (Nagorski). One cannot discount the extent of the Polish tragedy—even if numerically far more Jews were lost. Furthermore, these were political prisoners, and as Zygmunt Gaudasinski, a former inmate, says, "The camp was created to destroy the most valuable part of Polish society, and the Germans partly succeeded in this" (Nagorski). Indeed, Poland lost many academics, politicians, and writers to the fires of the crematorium. Perhaps more telling is the lack of world attention given to the Polish plight. In conducting an internet data search, it took a considerable amount of time to find data regarding Polish casualties whereas figures on Jews were relatively easy to obtain.

Several of the Poles I spoke with appeared to feel cheated by the (relative) lack of sympathy the world has displayed to their suffering. They felt they were being labeled as perpetrators when in fact they were victims. [5] This sentiment was expressed when I was speaking with a young, college-educated English teacher in a small Polish town during my research. He had invited me to talk to his class, and afterwards we briefly discussed my project as he was curious to know what had brought me to Poland. When I began describing Jewish opinions toward Poles, he became very agitated and immediately asked (rhetorically) why Poland deserves such a bad reputation. "We did more than, for example, the French [to save Jews] but no one blames the French. We sacrificed our own lives to save Jews!" [6] Similar statements were repeated to me throughout my trip.

Auschwitz has become the symbol of oppression for two distinct groups. Poles undoubtedly realize the significance Auschwitz has for Jews, but from my interviews with former participants of the March of the Living it seems that many Jews are unaware that Poles were also imprisoned and murdered in the camp.[7] Without this knowledge, Jews are unlikely to think of Auschwitz as anything other than a sign of *Jewish* suffering. Throughout the last half century, the camp and its town have been the center of a constant struggle between two competing groups. No place better represents the struggle between the two sides than the camp and its surrounding areas.

It took only two years after the liberation before the first official memorial appeared at Auschwitz. Based on descriptions of the dedication, the seeds of the coming

[5] *Neighbors*, a book by Jan Gross details the mass execution of a group of Jews by their Polish neighbors during the war. Though the facts put forth in the book are hard to dispute, I argue that most Poles feel it is an unfair portrayal—one small town in a country of millions where many gave their lives to save, rather than kill, their Jewish neighbors.

[6] As this was not a formal interview it was not recorded. The conversation has been reconstructed from notes I took immediately after the encounter.

[7] Though not all Poles might *appreciate* it, various international conflicts involving Jewish groups and the camp have undoubtedly given Poles the impression that Jews feel the site is extremely important to them.

conflict are easy to spot. Over 30,000 people attended the event, including the prime minister at the time, Jozef Cyrankiewicz. His speech contained the animosity that Poles have traditionally expressed toward their German neighbor; "The museum will be not only an eternal warning and document of unbound German bestiality, but also at the same time proof of truth about man and his fight for freedom" (Huener 33). It is interesting to note that a representative of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland was also invited to speak in the ceremony.

Despite this inclusion, the theme of the event was undeniably Polish nationalism, not Jewish remembrance. As Jonathan Huener writes, "[the day represented] a new world order free of the Hitlerite menace, a museum documenting Nazi atrocities in occupied Poland, the righting of wrongs done to Poland, a vengeful patriotic anthem, and a cross erected on what is arguably the largest Jewish cemetery in the world" (34).

The ensuing decades proved uncontroversial, but significant for the camp. The museum welcomed visiting Poles who learned from its exhibits that it represented, "a center of Polish suffering and heroic Polish resistance" (59). During this time, the site was virtually ignored by the rest of the world. In fact, a search of *The New York Times* archives reveals that, of the approximately 10 articles with the keyword "Auschwitz" written between 1947 and 1960, all are related to war crimes trials involving camp leaders. [8]

For decades, Jews resented the lack of recognition of Jewish suffering at Auschwitz and this came to a head in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The catalyst was the founding of a Carmelite convent in a building adjacent to the Auschwitz I facility that

[8] As the museum was dedicated in June 1947, I take it as an acceptable starting point for tracking post-war coverage of the camp.

had been used as a warehouse during the camp's operation. Fifteen nuns took residence on August 1, 1984 and prepared for a life of prayer dedicated to those—regardless of religion—who had perished at the camp. As Emma Klein writes, "…viewed from a Catholic perspective, the desire of the nuns to pray for the expiation of the crimes committed in Auschwitz and to obtain by intercession the mercy of God seemed to reflect Christian goodwill and solidarity towards the suffering of the Jewish people" (Klein 4). As proof of her claim that the nuns meant no harm, she cites Archbishop Muszynski Gniezno who said, "I would never have expected that the Jews would react in such a way. We thought that first of all, it's the same God…I was very much surprised that the Jews had something against the nuns…" (5).

By 1989, a crisis was emerging. On February 22, the sisters erected a large (seven meters tall) cross at the front of the warehouse which, by all accounts, was clearly visible to visitors of the camp. The cross had been used for a mass led by Pope John Paul, II at Auschwitz ten years prior.

Led by Rabbi Avi Weiss, a group of American Jews traveled to the site of the convent to protest the cross. Accounts differ radically as to what happened next. In her synopsis, Professor Annamaria Orla-Bukowska says the Jews climbed the walls of the convent and began jeering at the nuns and otherwise acting in a belligerent manner until some workmen dumped an unidentified liquid on them. [9] In her book, Klein tells the story differently; "demonstrators brandished a banner…Weiss read a declaration…then requested that the Polish ecclesiastical authorities at least remove the huge wooden cross as an initial gesture of good will…Reported this way, Weiss and his followers were

[9] This action is made more deplorable when one considers that the Carmelite order refrains from any outside contact to the point where the sisters will only accept visitors (including family) in a room with a partition between them.

engaged in nothing more than a peaceful if hardly silent demonstration…An outlandish way of going about things, no doubt, but violent it was not" (17). After dumping the liquid—Weiss claimed it was a mixture of paint and urine—the workers, "punched and kicked the Jews and shouted obscenities," according to Klein (17).

Eventually the sisters were relocated and the cross hidden by trees. The event brought to the surface the deep divide over Auschwitz that had been growing between Poles and Jews. Catholicism has always been a key part of Polish identity and to Poles the cross stood as a memorial to their fallen citizens. To Poles, the Jewish demand to remove it was both incomprehensible and sacrilegious. As a result of the original cross, Polish pilgrims flocked to the convent and placed multiple, smaller crosses. Despite protests from Jewish groups, a representative of the prime minister stated he was expecting, "our Jewish friends to respect the feelings of Catholics" (73).

Aside from the controversy over the cross, there have been other conflicts between Poles and Jews over Auschwitz. One of the Poles interviewed spoke of Jews "forcing" the town to close down a disco. Interestingly, of the 24 news stories about the disco, only two (Associated Press and Newsweek) were US sources, with the rest mostly German or Canadian.

The controversy was first reported in October 1999 before the disco opened. A Jewish representative said he was "astonished" at the choice of location—a "former tannery in which hundreds of concentration camp prisoners worked during World War II" ("Auschwitz youth centre protests at disco plan"). The article quoted a district council chairman who defended the plan. "Prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp died at locations all over the town…In the end no one would be able to love, reside, or work

here" ("Auschwitz youth centre protests at disco plan"). It is worth noting that the tannery was in a building two kilometers from the main camp—thereby substantiating the chairman's claim that it is little different from the many other buildings in the town with a dark past.

Within a year after the proposal was made, the disco was opened. The Simon Wiesenthal Center led the campaign of Jewish organizations protesting the disco and put out a statement saying, "If not moved or promptly closed, the center will urge groups…to boycott establishments adjacent to the death camp" ("Auschwitz youth centre protests at disco plan"). [10]

The deputy director of the Wiesenthal Center met with the mayor of Oswiecim who, "explained he had no legal means to prevent the construction of the disco, which is located on private property not subject to any zoning restrictions" (Sibierski). Upon concluding the meeting, the representative of the Wiesenthal Center said that the disco, "only proved the city needs help" (Sibierski).

Several other Poles I interviewed mentioned the Jewish cemetery in the town with one questioning why it must be locked. News reports show that in 2000, 2001, and 2003 the cemetery was vandalized—mostly in the form of overturning headstones and leaving anti-Semitic (and anti-Gypsy) graffiti. Although none of the stories provide much detail, it seems that locking the gates has managed to exclude those with legitimate interests while doing little to stop those with more sinister motives.

Methods

[10] One wonders how effective this would be. All sides agree that tourists visiting the camp are unlikely to spend any money at shops in the town.

The majority of information used in this paper comes from interviews with five Jewish teenagers who went on the March of the Living and 10 Polish residents of the town of Oswiecim. These interviews were conducted in the winter 2004 and spring 2005. Both groups were asked to answer a questionnaire designed to illicit information and opinions on Jewish-Polish relations. Four of the students were recruited by an email message sent to most[11] of the 2004 group from Columbus. I was put in contact with one participant through the Ohio State Chabad House.[12] The participants were told only that the research was on the March of the Living and Poland.

The Polish respondents were approached in the town of Oswiecim near the main square. They were asked by my translator if they would be willing to answer some questions about the March of the Living or in some cases, "Jewish groups that come to see Auschwitz."[13] Those that agreed were interviewed on the street by my translator who read the survey from a piece of paper.

The Polish survey took place in December 2004. On that particular day, it happened to be both bitterly cold and extremely windy which undoubtedly made the prospect of responding to questions less appealing to those we asked. There were also several merchants in the square attempting to sell products to passersby and we were undoubtedly mistaken for them. As one woman walked away from us after interrupting my translator before he could finish his sentence, she said, "I have already spoken with you yesterday." This is unlikely since we had only been in the town since that morning.

With fewer people taking time to answer our survey compared to those who kept walking, it is tempting to conclude the subject matter was sensitive to many. In light of

[11] I was not able to reach all of the participants.
[12] A Jewish campus organization that, though open to all denominations, is run by Orthodox Jews.
[13] Not all Poles are familiar with the formal name of the program.

the information above, I contend this would be a false conclusion. Because of the inclement weather and the "marketing" schemes in the town, it is no wonder that most people brushed us off before we could explain our mission. In fact, the most common response, from those that opted not to talk with us, was something along the lines of "no thank you" or "not interested" immediately after our interpreter said, "Excuse, me do you have a minute to speak with us?" Of those that did stop after being asked to answer questions, almost all were comfortable with answering questions about the "March of the Living," but we did get about four respondents who told us they did not wish to speak about Jews.

I have learned from this project that electronic recording—of any kind—can be problematic for a number of reasons. The challenges increase substantially when one is forced to work through a translator because the answers cannot be understood until after the respondent has left. Upon reviewing transcripts, there are dozens of follow-up questions that I wish I had asked but, due to the circumstances, cannot. In the text of this paper, the reader most likely will also wonder about the same questions. For example, I am struck by the testimony of one resident of Oswiecim who says he knows a Jewish person living in Japan with whom he corresponds via email.

There is hardly a transcript, either Polish or English, in which the entire conversation could be transcribed fully. The Polish translations are of especially poor quality because of the background noises, particularly the sound of passing buses. Parts of all ten interviews could be understood, but almost all had sections that were unintelligible.

In recreating the discussions, I have taken a certain liberty in "filling in" small gaps with the most logical choices. I have marked these with footnotes throughout this paper. I have also made minimal revisions in the grammar for the purposes of readability.

When interviewing participants in the March of the Living Program, a digital voice recorder was used in place of note-taking. Unfortunately, this device failed, erasing five interview records. After contacting the five participants, two agreed to send typed responses to the interview questions, one agreed to be interviewed again in person, and two did not respond to my request. I have omitted responses from these latter two in describing the responses except where indicated. I have elected to use a limited number of answers from these two records—based on memory—only when absolutely certain as to the responses.[14] During the course of my interviews, I noticed certain patterns in responses and made slight changes to the questions being asked—mostly in the form of additional follow-up questions. Thus, there are several questions to which only a portion of the participants responded.

The March of the Living

The March of the Living is organized through two main offices, one in New York and one in Tel Aviv. These offices handle the large-scale logistics of the March, as well as more mundane tasks such as maintaining the website and creating the study guide given

[14] Furthermore, the answers are added only in the form of whether the participants responded negatively or positively to a question; I do not trust my memory enough to go beyond this.

to Marchers prior to the trip. In the United States, most participants[15] attend the march with a contingent from their city. These contingents are "bundled" into larger regional groups that remain together throughout the trip. The Midwest Group typically has between 100-150 members. These groups travel through Poland and Israel together and, for all practical purposes, a participant from Columbus will spend just as much time with participants from other Midwestern cities as with students from Columbus.

In terms of organization, each contingent (city) has at least one group leader who stays with the students throughout the trip. This person is also in charge of any pre-trip meetings or workshops for the participants. Above the group leader is the regional group leader. The regional group leader handles virtually all aspects of the trip except the actual March in Auschwitz and a gathering of all participants in the final days in Israel. The regional leader can choose which camps to visit in Poland and in what programs the group will participate.[16] The regional leader also is in charge of the selection of potential Marchers.[17]

Since no participant I interviewed could recall receiving the national study guide, it appears that the group leaders, within the framework of the March, have the greatest impact on what the students experience. To better understand their impact, I spoke with two leaders—Ruth Goldberg who led the Columbus contingent in 2002 and 2004 and Rabbi Arthur Meyer, who led the Midwest Group for the past 14 years. I have changed their names in order to protect their identities.

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[15] Some go with contingents not based on geographic location. For example, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO) members may elect to go with a group of other BBYO members from around the country, etc.

[16] Though the regional leader I spoke with stressed his autonomy, it appears that, at least in regards to the camps, most all Marchers can expect to see roughly the same sites.

[17] The application includes essay questions, though it is unclear exactly how "competitive" selection is.

Both became involved with the program for different reasons. The Columbus group leader attributes her interest to her family background; "You need to understand what happened before to understand Israeli society. My mother was from Poland and I lost a large number of family members." She also attributes her decision to the fact that her son was a participant and that the Jewish Federation asked if she would be interested in leading a March. The other leader, who was (and still is) the superintendent of several Jewish schools in the Chicago area, was asked to take over running the March from the previous leader who was preparing to retire. He had not been to Poland prior to his involvement.

According to the Midwest Group Leader, although the Marchers have changed little in terms of attitudes and behaviors, the message of the March has. [18] "[It] has been sharpened. The message has always been from destruction to rebirth." He went on to comment that "there has been a greater growth of Jewish life in Poland. When we first started going, there was nothing there."

The two leaders could, without any need for pause, list instances of anti-Semitism they have encountered while in Poland. Meyer spoke of once having a student get pushed to the ground by some Polish teenagers but said that the incidents have been relatively minor. Goldberg had more to say. "I was attacked by a Polish woman my age, maybe a bit older on a tour of Warsaw in the afternoon." Last year, there was a more violent incident; "…Our security guard was attacked. He was a Polish guard. They thought he was one of us." The guard was hit by a car, but survived without serious injury. Thinking back to how she felt, she says, "It made me angry. I was very, very angry." As for the students, she said, "It's hard for the kids not to respond, when you consider the history,

[18] Goldberg was not asked this question due to her relatively recent involvement with the program.

and apply it against all of [Polish citizens].” Although students can learn about this history in their study guides, it seems that most do not. Therefore, any awareness about Polish anti-Semitism comes either from either what they had learned from their parents and relatives, or from group leaders.

Meyer, having never witnessed anything as severe as what Goldberg encountered, placed more emphasis on the group leaders than on the Poles. “[Anti-Semitism] may be based on perception. There are some people who imagine there are anti-Semitic people around every corner. Sometimes when you’re looking for some anti-Semitism you interpret everything that comes up that could be purely accidental as intentional.” When asked about how a group leader can shape these feelings, Meyer said, “It’s entirely up to the leader.”

Goldberg had similar views regarding the influence of the leader on the group. “If you have a leader that promotes hatred, then the message can be a message of hatred. For example: That the Poles are murderers and we shouldn’t talk to them…and they are still our enemy. If that’s the message then that’s what the students are going to come away with. The leader must talk about the need to remember without hatred. The group is very vulnerable and the leader can do a lot and it really depends on him or her.” When asked if she had ever, in her two trips with the March, seen a group leader speak with the negative tone she described, she responded that, “I have seen leaders speaking with hatred several times.”

Goldberg appeared genuine in her belief that a good leader can teach students to “remember without hatred,” but she conceded later in the interview that, at least with her group, sometimes students will come away with a negative view of Poles even with a

good group leader. I was surprised at her answer when I asked what she thought the students thought of Poland. "After [the trip] they said they hated the Poles, they hated Poland…They left Poland not liking it, hating it."[19] She also commented that, upon arrival in Israel, "They felt they were free. They felt they were imprisoned in Poland. It could be that some of the leaders promoted it." In addition, Goldberg noted that the students were told not to spend money in Poland,[20] which undoubtedly can only lead to an increase of resentment amongst Poles.[21]

In part, these negative feelings toward Poland could be the result of the structure of the trip. The students spend almost all of their time viewing sites of Jewish tragedies. Since the only non-Jewish components of the trip, such as tours of cities, are optional, it is not surprising many students end their week in Poland with the opinion that "they were imprisoned."

When asked how she felt about this hatred expressed by her students, Goldberg paused and was obviously troubled by it. She again repeated the need to learn to remember without hatred. She acknowledged that the Poles appeared to be trying to foster a dialogue. One day during dinner the students found pamphlets (in English) about the positive aspects of Polish/Jewish history. Despite these small efforts, it appeared the participants were not interested in learning about Poland. "We went to Warsaw [to see non-Jewish sites] twice which was optional. The guides tried to show us things but the students really weren't interested in seeing it." Furthermore, "very few" students went on

[19] This is in conflict with the opinions expressed by participants (detailed later in this paper). Either they were being more "guarded" in their answers, Goldberg has a pessimistic outlook, or the sample is not an accurate representation.
[20] I was given similar instructions when I went in 2000.
[21] I admit I did not hear this in any of my interviews but I argue that if this is in fact an "unspoken rule" among all groups *and* the students follow the rule (a different matter indeed) a survey of shop owners in towns frequented by the March would show an increase in frustration, resentment, or similar feelings.

these side trips but she attributed it to the (very plausible) fact that the students were tired.

I asked both leaders if they thought there should be an increased attempt to bring Marchers and Polish teenagers together. Both were hesitant. Goldberg said that she thinks it is important but, "I'm not sure the March itself is the place." Meyer was more direct; "Honestly, the goal of the trip is not to deal with the question of tolerance. My goal of the trip is to deal with the Jewish experience. If I were focusing more on the Holocaust[22] I would probably deal more with these Polish teenagers." He later said, toward the end of the interview, "In terms of current Polish-Jewish relations, we don't need to deal with a lot of those issues. But [the participants] should understand that not every German or every Pole was a Nazi or a collaborator and on the other hand not every Jew was righteous." He did not mention how he gets this message to the participants.

If there was one clear message from both of these interviews, it was that the leader is responsible for shaping the views of participants. This system allows both for the autonomy described by Meyer and the teaching of hatred witnessed by Goldberg. If the March can control anything, it is the selection of the leaders it chooses to employ. From the testimony of both Meyer and Goldberg, it appears the March of the Living fails in this regard. Although I have no doubt that both were extremely cautious in what they told me—the questions I asked, no matter how carefully worded, made it obvious I was interested in an oft-criticized aspect of the program—I feel that Goldberg was genuine in her statements about tolerance and, even though Meyer said his goal "is not to deal with

[22] Meyer said he is more interested in tailoring his program to what Jewish life was like *before* the Holocaust though, later in the interview, he said the goal is to teach, "this is what Jewish life once was like, *this is how precarious our history has been"* (emphasis added).

the question of tolerance," I know from having attended the trip in his regional group that he is not contributing to the pattern of Jewish hatred toward Poles.

Perhaps the structure of the trip makes it most susceptible to this negative influence. The students travel in their regional groups with a number of group leaders. For example, the Columbus group sends two or three leaders every year and travels with about five other groups. Students in this regional group are exposed to 15-20 adult supervisors. Inevitably, every student can expect to share a bus seat, a dinner table, or even a hotel room with each of the leaders. If Goldberg could hear inappropriate messages from several group leaders, the students could as well. In fact, this was touched on in the interviews with participants. When prodded about whether their group leader (for all but one it was Goldberg) seemed to be biased against Poles[23] the answer was often, "No, but I heard one of the other group leaders say…" Indeed, it appears the March not only fails to screen out bad apples, but compounds the problem by allowing those apples to travel throughout the bin.

Overall, participants have a positive view of the program. A recent survey by Professor William B. Helmreich has done much to shed light on participants, their motivations, and the effects of the program. His research involved interviewing some 300 former participants that marched in 1992, 1999, and 2003 (Helmreich 3).

His results show that the program is successful in its goal of strengthening Jewish identity. In fact, the March of the Living website even features a link to Helmreich's report. Almost half of participants had already returned to Israel after the March of the Living (8). This is even more impressive when one takes into account that the survey

[23] The actual question was, "In dealing with questions of history, did the group leader seem to portray Poles in a negative, positive, or neutral light?"

took place only one year after a third of the participants had returned from the 2003 March. Almost all participants felt it important that their spouse be Jewish. The report quotes one respondent who said, "I would not insist that [my boyfriend] convert, but we probably wouldn't have ended up getting married…It was an issue from the very beginning for me" (9).

An interesting trend was the ability of Marchers to extrapolate Jewish suffering to other groups. About 65% reported "that the trip made them more tolerant towards other groups" (12). Unfortunately, the survey did not explicitly ask participants about their opinions toward Poles, as it would be interesting to see if the "tolerance level" would be as high.

Not surprisingly, 93% of respondents felt the trip led to "an increase in Jewish identity" (14). Helmreich also acknowledges the small number, presumably part of that 7%, who feel the March does more harm than good. "Several respondents were critical of the March, charging that it played upon and manipulated people's emotions, but those feeling this way represented perhaps 2% of those who went" (18).

Before one concludes that the March is a truly transformative experience and one which has the power to make observant Jews out of the most secular high school students, there is an inherent flaw in Helmreich's research that must be addressed. These students, those that chose to march, are self-selected. In fact, the selection is rather significant in this case: students are expected to miss upwards of 10 school days *and* cover up to a few thousand dollars[24] (depending on local scholarships and grants) of the cost of the trip. Helmreich acknowledges this in his introduction by saying, "Naturally, March participants are a somewhat select group inasmuch as it can be argued that the

[24] The "retail" price of the 2005 March, as stated in the application brochure, is $3,200.

decisions to go indicated a perhaps greater than average commitment to things Jewish" (4).

The author of the study makes no effort to hide his support of the program, and it is difficult to tell whether the March of the Living is the cause or the effect of a strong Jewish identity. Despite these shortcomings, the results are still telling. Marchers appear to have a strong sense of Jewish identity before setting foot in Poland; the effort to get that far is substantial. Given this, the program seems to espouse a particular view of Jewish identity based on persecution. As one student quoted in the survey said, "The March of the Living definitely scared me into seeing what the future has in store for the Jewish people" (12).

Most criticisms of the March have come from Poles, but there are members of the Jewish community who disagree with both the message and nature of the trip. It appears that the tendency to shape Jewish identity in terms of the Holocaust, coupled with the young age of participants, is a concern for some Jews. I spoke with Tamar Rudavsky, a professor of philosophy at The Ohio State University and head of the Melton Center for Jewish Studies, about her feelings toward the March.

Professor Rudavsky had strong criticisms of the program. She felt the program sends the wrong message to its participants. "Part of what bothers me is that it reinforces this view of Jewish history: Good Jews being attacked by bad guys." This sentiment was also expressed in an article in *New Voices*, a "progressive" magazine written "by and for Jewish college students." The article describes the program as one that "fosters an irrational fear of anti-Semitism and uses the Holocaust to bolster Zionist sentiment and Jewish identity." The article concludes with the author's assessment that, "[former

participants] insist that experiences like the March, which give young Jews no positive reasons for being Jewish, will not suffice" as a means of Holocaust education (Schnitzer 36). As Rudavsky stated, "[Jewish identity] should not be based on 'don't forget what they did to us.'" She went on to say that the March could, in theory, change from this paradigm if it allowed for the inclusion of other human atrocities besides the Holocaust. She quickly added, "And I suspect that will never happen."

Another point of contention has been the age of Marchers. With most participants in their Junior or Senior year of high school, some feel the program tries to manipulate their still-developing sense of identity. A former participant, as quoted in *New Voices*, said, "At that age, [teenagers are] like putty, highly impressionable" (22). Cindy Friedman, Program Director of the Department of Overseas Students at the Hebrew University Hillel, expressed a similar sentiment in the same article. "High school is probably too young…Perhaps we should focus on sending college students. They generally seem more equipped to handle such an intense experience and to actually learn from it, rather than just feeling it" (22). Rudavsky also agreed with this, saying, "I do not think 15 or 16 year olds are emotionally, intellectually ready to deal with the Holocaust."[25]

Results from Interviews

I was able to interview five past participants of the March of the Living program. Of the five, four had attended the March as a group in the spring of 2004. Three were juniors at

[25] Though most participants tend to be older (17 or 18) it is not uncommon for sophomores to attend, as was the case for me when I was 16 years old.

the time and one is currently a freshman in college. From this group, three attend (or in the latter case attend*ed*) Columbus Torah Academy (CTA) where participation in the March is heavily encouraged—several participants I spoke with indicated that all but two or three students in their grade went on the trip. One participant attends a local public high school but went because she went to CTA in middle school where she was introduced to the trip. The other past participant attended the March in 2000 when he was a sophomore in high school. He attended high school outside of Columbus and went on the trip with some friends through the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization.[26] By gender, two of the participants were female and the remaining three were male.

I shall refer to the participants as Apryl, Rachel, Kevin, Ben, and Isaac.[27] All besides Isaac and Apryl went through CTA. Kevin said that even though participation in this trip is expected, he wanted to go to see the remains of the Holocaust. "…I wanted to experience the death camps firsthand because through books it never got to me. I thought that by going on [the March of the Living] I could have a connection with the past. Other CTA students did not share, or were not asked, specific reasons for their interest in the trip.

Apryl and Isaac went for different reasons. Apryl had gone to CTA in middle school where she was introduced to the trip. "The seniors who had just gone on it came back and showed us pictures and talked to us about the trip and I really wanted to go." Isaac went because of a family history. "My mom knew about it; her father is a Survivor. She knew about it and encouraged me to go whether it was with a group or not." Isaac,

[26]BBYO is a non-denominational (but largely Reform) national Jewish youth organization with the stated goal of, "provid[ing] opportunities for Jewish youth to develop their leadership potential, a positive Jewish identity and commitment to their personal development."
[27] I have changed their names to protect their identities.

and two friends from his BBYO chapter, went with a larger regional group comprised of people he had not previously met.

None of the participants from 2004 could recall anything being mentioned about a study guide. Further, although Isaac could remember *receiving* the guide, even after five years he had no trouble recalling that he did not read it. I suspect that, given the age of the participants, it is doubtful many who did receive the guide would answer differently. For all of its controversy, the guide appears insignificant given that fact that it is either ignored by students or not utilized by organizers.[28] All of the students spoke about attending pre-trip meetings and workshops and it appears that CTA incorporates these trips into the class curriculum.

All of the participants expected the trip to be emotional, depressing, and/or life-changing. The March itself plays on this last theme. The first sentence of the 2000 study guide reads, "You are about to embark upon an exciting experience, one that may just change your life." The next paragraph is more direct. "[The March] will be an experience of a lifetime." More recent materials include the March's new slogan: "You can change the world." Although not as explicit, the implication is that this trip will be a deeply powerful and emotional experience.

Kevin expressed some concerns he had prior to the March about the nature of the trip. "I thought it would be this really serious program where if you made one out of place comment it would be the end of the world." Ben echoed this when he said, "I thought it was going to be an emotional and serious trip and life changing." When I asked if this was the case he said, "It was pretty emotional and serious, but it could have been

[28] The guide is still being produced, as a brochure for the 2005 March reads, "If you are chosen, you will be provided with a study curriculum on Poland and Israel…"

more so. The group I was with wasn't exactly the best in the world." Kevin also said he was surprised that, "It was really social and not a lot of people were serious about it [which made it] harder for me to take it seriously." Despite being in the same group as Kevin and Ben, Apryl did not feel the trip was compromised by a lack of seriousness. "I expected the trip to be very sad and depressing…it definitely did meet my expectations."

Isaac reacted completely differently. He admitted that he was immature at the time (a sophomore in high school) and that he was more confident about his ability to handle the emotional stress than he really was. "I didn't expect myself to be quite as unprepared. I thought I could handle things more than I could. It was more emotional than I thought it would be." These concerns mirror the criticism put forth by Rudavsky regarding the trip as being both too "heavy" for such a young age and also possibly manipulative.[29]

None of the participants had been to Poland before. Not surprisingly, their reactions toward the country bear the mark of witnessing a constant stream of death and suffering. "It's a pretty stark place" said Isaac. When asked if they would ever want to go back to Poland, reactions were mixed. Rachel said, "Probably not, I did not feel very welcome." Both Apryl and Ben said that if they were to go back, it would only be to see Holocaust sites. Apryl also added that, "…it is not my ideal vacation place." Kevin and Isaac both would go back to see other parts of Poland. Isaac admitted that "we didn't see the nightlife or any of the cultural aspects" and said he would like to spend time in Warsaw or Krakow. Kevin was interested in returning to see the camps, but also to visit

[29] Despite Isaac's answer, he did not indicate, after several years of reflection and maturation, that this emphasis on emotion was a bad thing.

Warsaw, which he said he enjoyed seeing on the trip. Another student[30] said he would also like to go back, in part because he is originally from Russia and enjoys that part of the world.

I included a question about the security on the March in hope of seeing whether the participants felt it created a barrier between them and Polish citizens. It appears that, at least in this case, the opposite is true. Almost all of the students from the Columbus group, including the two whose recordings were lost, used the question as an opportunity to speak about Tomek. Tomek was the Polish security guard who accompanied the group throughout the Polish part of the trip. It was clear from the interviews that he formed a very close relationship with these students and, based on other questions, it appears that for most of them he was their only chance to interact with a Pole. Comments about him ranged from, "He was friendly" (Apryl) to "He was awesome" (Kevin).

It appears that Tomek was an incredible resource for this group, and the relationship went both ways; when I first met Goldberg it was at a teacher training workshop. She was carrying a rather large book she had just received in the mail that afternoon that had come from Tomek along with a letter—this being over six months after the group left Poland. If I could interview him, I am sure he would have a favorable opinion of Jews—his actions clearly demonstrate this.

The subject of Polish anti-Semitism led to many surprising answers. All participants except Kevin reported seeing some form of anti-Semitism. Many students spoke of seeing graffiti with Stars of David and swastikas. All the students that spoke of

[30] One of the two where I have no record of our conversation.

this remembered their guides explaining that this has to do with a soccer rivalry.[31] They still indicated that they felt it was anti-Semitic. Despite these feelings, it appears the group leaders did all they could to explain what is a complicated concept to high school students.

The issue of perception, as described by Rabbi Meyer, also played a part. Rachel said, "There were people picnicking and walking their dogs in the camps…it was pretty obvious they did not want us there." Apryl said that, "I also noticed that when we were driving by…someone made a Heil Hitler salute." Without questioning what they saw, it is worth restating Meyer's concern. "Sometimes when you're looking for anti-Semitism you interpret everything that comes up that could be purely accidental as intentional."

Of course not everything the students said was so ambiguous. Isaac reported that some "punks" started jeering at his group leader outside of one of the camps but "the security guard showed them the butt of his gun from his coat pocket" which was enough to end the incident. The CTA group also witnessed someone attempt to run over Tomek with his car, but the details are unclear.[32]

Despite the incidents, most participants found the trip to be relatively quiet. Kevin offered the most about how this made him feel. I asked him if he was surprised that he did not see any anti-Semitism. He said that he was. Pressing him further, I asked if he thought other people in the group felt the same. "I think so, I think a lot of people were surprised." In part this might have been because of the reputation of the trip. "I remember hearing from past participants that there is anti-Semitism everywhere." Rachel also said

[31] Two teams and Krakow are fierce competitors and, for reasons beyond the scope of this paper, one team's unofficial sign has become a Jewish star. If this sounds strange, I argue it is hardly different from American standards (Notre Dame's Fighting Irish and the Cleveland Indians come to mind). The graffiti is also mentioned in my discussion with Professor Bukowska (described later in this paper).
[32] Several people have told me several different versions of what happened.

that, “I had heard from other people who had been on the March that people would yell and shout at us.”

I was not expecting what came next from Kevin; “I was sort of looking forward to having all those anti-Semites, so we could show them that ‘we are here.’” Caught off guard, I asked if he felt disappointed that there was no one there yelling at him. “In a way I did. It’s weird to say that…”

I find his answer to be telling. Although none of the other participants were so candid, I suspect many shared his thoughts. The other students from CTA all mentioned hearing about anti-Semitism from students who had gone on the trip, yet they were still eager to participate. Kevin admitted that his expectations were mostly based on what past participants had said, but also that, “[the group leaders] told us maybe a little bit, that there would be [anti-Semites].”

Despite their expectations, the 2004 group encountered quite the opposite during the actual March in Auschwitz. Rachel remembered, “[Instead of yelling at us] they held up Israeli flags and waved flags behind us. That was the first time we felt like they didn’t want us to go home.” Kevin too remembered the support. “All there was was a little group of kids cheering us on waving an Israeli flag someone had given them.”

Participants did not agree on how the group leaders portrayed Poles in the context of history. Apryl and Rachel both thought Poles were portrayed in a fair (“neutral”) fashion. Apryl thought that during the trip the lessons were fair, but also commented, “We did learn, however, that a lot of [Poles] did not do anything to help the Jews, and they took advantage of their absence.” She was not clear as to whether she thought Poles deserved this reputation.

Ben, Isaac, and Kevin all felt Poles were portrayed negatively to varying degrees. Ben said, "I think they portrayed them in a slightly negative light. They did mention that there were a few who tried to help, but they talked about how many of them just watched or encouraged the Shoah."[33] Kevin and Isaac both thought Poles were portrayed in a negative light, and Isaac added, "probably for good reason." Kevin commented that the group leaders seemed to imply Polish responsibility was on par with the Nazis which he thought was wrong, acknowledging that, "[Poles] might have been able to do something [to stop the Holocaust] but under the circumstances I don't see how they could have."

All the students made it clear that, apart from Tomek, they had virtually no contact with Poles aside from bus drivers, and other service people. I asked them if they would have wanted to meet with Poles, particularly teenagers. Most were interested. Kevin said he would have, especially if the person had been alive during the Holocaust. Isaac thought it would have been a good opportunity, but said he did not think about it much at the time. Rachel said she would have "loved" to get a chance to talk to Poles and Apryl did not answer the question.[34] Perhaps the most significant answer came from Ben: "I don't think I would want to, unless I could have found a Pole who wasn't anti-Semitic." Despite having admitted earlier in the interview that he did not see any signs of anti-Semitism aside from "one or two swastikas," Ben left Poland somehow convinced that the average Pole disliked Jews.

It is not clear what responsibility the March has for attitudes such as Ben's. Even if accidental, it appears that the organizers of the March portray Poland as a place of sadness. This then becomes juxtaposed with the time spent in Israel which is portrayed as

[33] A Hebrew word roughly translating to "Whirlwind" that many Jews use to refer to the Holocaust.
[34] Apryl agreed to answer the survey via email and most likely did not see the follow-up question.

a positive sign of Jewish life. This dichotomy is both implicit and explicit. The first page of the 2000 study guide informs the participant she will experience "a journey from darkness to light." The 2005 brochure speaks of a "study of contrasts" between Israel and Poland. More implicitly, the brochure features an array of photographs of both Poland and Israel. Every picture in Israel is sunny whereas all the pictures of Poland, save for one[35] are overcast. A view of the website shows color pictures of Israel contrasted with black and white pictures of Poland.

After spending some time looking through the materials, I made an interesting observation: The brochure advertising the 2005 trip has the same picture on the cover as does the 2000 study guide: The procession of thousands of Jewish teens contrasted with an overcast sky and puddles of water along the road.[36] Although the recent brochure shows clear signs of revision (it shows a picture of the banner from the 2004 trip), the organizers have chosen to use, as the main image in the pamphlet, an outdated photograph. It appears that the image has been retained over the years in order to create the impression that Poland is a dark, dreary country. Granted this one instance is unlikely to have much effect, but if it can be taken to be representative of the March's (and its group leaders') views of Poland—and interviews contained in this paper appear to show that it can—then it is no wonder a Marcher can walk away feeling that Poland is a land rife with so much anti-Semitism that one would actually have to consciously try to find a Pole that was not hostile toward Jews.

Both the 2000 and the 2004 Marches were held on exceptionally beautiful days. At least one participant (Ben) was bothered by this. Perhaps the brochures had influenced

[35] A picture of participants holding a banner that reads "March of the Living 2004."
[36] It is clear from the details (colors of peoples' hats, etc.) that this is the same image. Color reproductions of both are included in the appendix.

him or perhaps it was from his own perception, but he said, "…It was a warm day which seemed somewhat wrong because it doesn't seem right that the sun could shine in a place where so much death and despair was located…I still wish the weather were harsher." It seems both the March and the Marchers benefit from portraying Poland as a place of misery and despair, though at least when it comes to weather, this is not always the case.

All the participants said they would recommend the trip to others. Most said they would do so enthusiastically. The Helmreich Survey suggests that 98% of participants come away with a positive view of the program and my research is in line with that statistic. It is possible that, given time, Kevin might come to develop negative views of the March, but the other four appeared to be unconditionally supportive of the program.

The Polish respondents were comprised of five males and five females. Exact ages were not recorded, but the sample ranged from teenagers to elderly adults. Several people had lived in the town since birth. Two said they had lived there for over 40 years. Three respondents have lived in the area for five years or less, indicating that, despite its reputation, Oswiecim is a desirable location for some Poles. Specific reasons for moving to the town were not asked. One male respondent indicated that he only works in the town but lives elsewhere.[37]

Most respondents indicated that they did not personally know any Jewish people. Four answered the question by responding negatively. None said that they currently know any Jewish people, apart from one who said that he knew someone in Japan (presumably Jewish) with whom he corresponds via email. Several respondents indicated past knowledge of Jews. One man answered, "I don't [know any Jewish people] but my mother did, before the war, when she was still alive, she knew some then. They had some

[37] This is not surprising as many interviews were conducted by the main bus stop.

small shops and such." Other answers alluded to relationships prior to the war. For example, one responded, "I knew some, but they are already deceased. I do not remember any names." Another said, "I had known an older lady, but I do not remember her name because it was a long time ago."

As a follow-up question, this woman was asked if her only contact with Jews had been this woman. She answered affirmatively and said, "she was very nice...we just talked very friendly so I don't have any prejudice toward the Jews because I never experienced any hostility[38] from them and my contact with them while I was working was very good."

Finally, there was one younger male who said that, he does not know any Jews, but his friends do. He used the question as an opportunity to express views critical of Jewish groups, which he continued to do throughout the interview. I have included his responses with the survey results, but will discuss his other comments (those not germane to the questions being asked) later in this paper.

Most respondents indicated they were aware of the Jewish groups that visited Auschwitz.[39] The phrasing of the question ("How many groups visit this site on average per year?") led to many answers along the lines of "I do not know." Several answered with "a lot" and one person alluded to the substantial media coverage by saying, "they show it on TV." Another respondent said, "Yes, they always visit for sure. Quite many." It is interesting that despite the tone of her answer (one senses some frustration, as if she

[38] In the recording this word is inaudible, but it appears to logically follow.
[39] Though March of the Living is by far the largest annual event to visit the site, there are numerous other groups that come, including groups of school children from Israel, individuals, and the constant international events commemorating the anniversary of milestones (most notably the liberation) in the camp's history. It would be expected that to the casual observer it would be difficult to differentiate between these many groups.

feels the town is on display) her subsequent answers indicated she had a positive view of these groups.

One man told us that, "As it happens I am a traffic control officer and I have the pleasure to direct the groups, whether on the March of the Living, or other occasions." One respondent said, "It seems to me a small number [of groups that come]." This gentleman was also the only person to report having any type of interaction with the group.

Some respondents gave reasons for not interacting with the groups. One was that he did not know anybody involved with them, so he only sees them but cannot talk or otherwise interact with them. Other responses to the question ("Have you ever interacted with these groups?") ranged from "no" to "no, no, no."[40] One woman, when answering the question, spoke of her trip to the Jewish cemetery. Although she had not been in contact with any of the groups, she felt connected to the Jewish community through acts of remembrance. She said, "It's being renovated, so the gate was open, and we lit candles, so that was it." Another woman also commented on the Jewish cemetery: "There's also a Jewish cemetery, so I quite often see pilgrim groups…they would rather not allow us into their cemetery, maybe because of, I do not know, vandalism?"

Six respondents indicated they would like to interact with these groups if given a chance. Of those six, one said "Yes, yes, of course. I do not have anything against them" and another said, "Sure, why not? I'd like to talk to them." The rest all gave some variation of "yes."

[40] This is most likely an artifact of the Polish language. It is typical when responding to answer negatively (or positively) multiple times and, on the whole, I do not think it carries the same implication (passionate disagreement) as it does with the English language.

Of the remaining four respondents, two gave "conditional" answers that still indicated some interest. One person said "Maybe if there is time, you know? But it's hard, we would have to meet first and so on" Another said, "I do not know the languages, and I am over 70 years old." Given other answers provided by this woman, it is likely that had she been asked a follow-up question ("If there was a translator and they provided transportation to a meeting place or if several students offered to come to your house, would you be interested in speaking with them?") she would have answered affirmatively. Finally, the remaining two answered the question negatively, one saying "No, not really" and the other, "No, I am not interested."

The respondents broke down the same way when asked how they viewed these groups.[41] Responses ranged from, "very positive" to "In general I have nothing against them." Several people made a point to say they had nothing against the Jews, as if trying to show they are not anti-Semitic. One woman said, "Pardon, sir. For me, it's all the same, whether it's a Jew or a Pole. So positive, of course." Again, this illustrates the desire of most citizens to shed the stereotype of the anti-Semitic Pole.

Of the two that answered the preceding question negatively, one gave a negative answer for this question and the other's answer was not decipherable. The answer that could be understood went something along the lines of, "Jews are such ____ people." Whatever this man said, it prompted the interviewer to ask, "So you have a negative view [of these groups]?" to which the respondent answered affirmatively.

The respondents were asked how many times they had visited the actual camp. It is a well-known anecdote that around the world inhabitants of cities with famous

[41] Of the original six that answered the preceding question positively, one person's answer was not recorded for this question.

landmarks often never visit them[42] and I was curious to see if this was true for Auschwitz. Also, one wonders how someone can live so close to the site of an atrocity. Perhaps they view it like residents of the southern United States who see numerous civil war memorials on the outskirts of their towns: well known, but rarely visited.

The responses to this query varied widely. Everyone had been to the camp at least once, with most (five) having been either more than five times (the most being "eight or nine") or having visited the camp more times than they can recall. The policeman commented that he was there often because of his job—he was not asked if he ever went for his own personal reasons. One woman, who has lived in the town for forty years, indicated that she often went when family came to visit. She noted that the church she attends (St. Maximilian) has, "a sort of offering to the people who perished. There is a plaque with a list of countries. We pray at Easter and Christmas and have pilgrimages to the museum."[43]

One woman said that she used to go often but has not been recently. "…For me it is a great shock when I go there. It causes great distress. So, in the last, maybe, ten years, I have not gone." Three respondents indicated they had been only two or three times. Of those three, one had lived in the area for only four years, one for 15, and one appeared to be fairly young—about 18 years old.

Finally, the two respondents who could be classified as anti-Semitic gave slightly different answers. The older male said he had only been once. The younger male said, "When I was still in school, we took a trip to the concentration camp. That place is as

[42] Residents of Jerusalem rarely go to the Temple Wall, residents of New York City do not visit the Statue of Liberty, etc.
[43] "Auschwitz Museum" is usually used interchangeably with the Auschwitz I camp. Most of the barracks hold exhibits about camp life and, though there is a museum/guest center on the site, this woman was most likely referring to the camp as a whole.

common for us as the Wawel Castle."[44] In this sense, he most likely meant "common" to refer to its insignificance as opposed to the number of times he had seen it.

Throughout the years, the March of the Living has responded to criticisms about the trip and its portrayal of Poland by making changes to the program. I asked these Poles if, from their end, they had noticed any changes. The only change people noted (4) was that the group has been getting bigger every year. One person answered by saying she had never seen the March. The rest said that they did not see any noticeable change.

As mentioned earlier, there was one respondent who gave several unsolicited opinions dealing with his thoughts on Jews and the Jewish religion in general. From my recollection, he was a young man in his 20's who appeared agreeable and friendly. I was not aware that he had said anything anti-Semitic until my translator told me after the interview had concluded. Unfortunately, a substantial amount of his interview was lost due to the background noise present in the square.

It appears the most controversial parts of his response have been lost, but I clearly remember my translator looking at me with disgust once he left. He was so affected by this man's answers as to feel the need to apologize to me on behalf of all Poles because I am Jewish.

In response to the question of whether he knows any Jews, he responded that though he did not, some of his friends did. He then went on to say,

> "Because of this camp here, all we have are problems. For example, near the museum, there is a place where the Jews had a warehouse during the war. Recently it was made

[44] Wawel (VA-vel) is a famous castle in the city of Krakow (approx. 40 minutes from Auschwitz) frequented by tourists and school groups alike.

> into a disco club, but the Jews wanted to use it as a memorial[45] so we could not use it for fun."

This response does much to highlight the tension between Jews and residents of Oswiecim: the residents see their town as a typical Polish village while Jews see it as anything but. This man's next response does even more to illustrate this point. "My friend witnessed when Jewish visitors were amazed that [Oswiecim] residents walk on the streets smiling. They think that it's incomprehensible in a place where so many people perished. So what are we supposed to do, bow our heads and cry?" Ultimately, it seems this is the question facing Jews and Poles today: is Poland nothing but a vast graveyard filled with gravediggers?

Later in the interview, he hinted at more development problems that have become issues in the town.

> "In general, we have split opinions about the Jews. So they have this campsite, but why? It only brings conflict. For example, after they were deported,[46] the Poles renovated the buildings, and they are coming back and demanding [restitution]. Another example is the Jewish cemetery and the apartment building next to it. I understand that the cemetery is a sacred site, but what to do now, demolish the building?"

Clearly he sees the Jews as overbearing and unwarranted in their grievances, and, although he does indicate some level of compassion ("I understand the cemetery is a sacred site") he appears to disagree with the solutions Jews have proposed. Finally, when asked if he would want to interact with Jews, he said, "That's their tradition. The same way as we have our holidays, they have theirs." Without placing a value judgment on his answer, it differed greatly from those of the rest of the group.

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[45] This word is unclear in the recording.
[46] It is unclear whether he meant this as a euphemism for "killed" or if he is unaware that Jews living in Poland were almost always "deported" to places of extermination.

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from these data. Most substantially, it is clear that these people, on a whole, are not anti-Semites. Almost all expressed varying amounts of sympathy toward the Jews and had a favorable impression of them. One even lit candles at the cemetery in honor of them. Coming from a community that has been at the center of this international conflict, this is nothing short of remarkable. These people have born the brunt of international protests against development projects and various other controversies. Despite this, they remain, overall, agreeable in nature in terms of Jews.

Furthermore, they are not ashamed of their past. In keeping with most of Poland, they view Auschwitz as a Polish tragedy along with a Jewish one: the Germans are the perpetrators, not their people. Anyone wishing to make the claim that Poland is rife with anti-Semitism must first deal with the fact that many Poles harbor no ill-will toward Jews and, furthermore, are open to starting a dialogue.

There is, of course, another side to this story. Two respondents gave critical views of Jews,[47] but it is not clear if they feel this way toward the religion as a whole or only the groups that visit Auschwitz. We must also stop to consider the number of people who refused to be interviewed for this paper. Most simply declined before we could explain we were not trying to sell perfume, but there were several that made it clear that they did not want "to talk about Jews" or simply walked off after hearing the subject of the interview.

Whether they walked away because of true anti-Semitism or simply because of their frustration with the legitimate disagreements between the town of Oswiecim and

[47] The question "What is your reaction toward these Holocaust groups" was answered negatively.

world Jewry is not known.[48] Unfortunately one cannot survey people on their reasons for abstaining from participating in a survey. Rather than dwell on these non-responders, I think the value lies in those that did: even if they are not representative of Oswiecim, it is clear that a large number (even if not 80%) of residents are not the vicious anti-Semites many March of the Living participants expected to see prior to their trip.

In addition to interviewing residents of Oswiecim, I had a chance to meet with Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, a professor of sociology at Jagiellonian University in Krakow. I had first met Professor Bukowska several years ago while studying in Poland and her initial comments about the March of the Living served both as realization that it is a topic worth studying and also as a motivation for this paper. Bukowska is an American-born (and educated) Catholic of Polish descent who is one of many non-Jewish professors that study various aspects of the religion. We spoke in a small café in Krakow—with American pop music playing in the background—about the March and Polish-Jewish relations in general.

It was clear from speaking with her that she had a great interest in facilitating discussion between Polish and Jewish groups. Although she was careful not to condemn the March outright, she told numerous stories of attempts she made to work with the organization that were rebuffed. At one point she even paid, with her own money, to rent a van to take high school students from Krakow to Oswiecim only to have a group leader that was unwilling to give more than 30 minutes to a joint activity.

She was clearly frustrated and, even if she did not condemn the organization, her bias was clear. During the conversation, she said, "Keep in mind that the Poles are

[48] I grant there are those in the Jewish community who hold that any disagreement is a form of anti-Semitism. For the purposes of this paper, I assume that there are legitimate concerns on behalf of the people of Auschwitz and that people who voice these concerns are not *prima facie* anti-Semites.

besieged not just for the March, but also for the Israeli trips" (emphasis added). [49] Presumably she was referring to the street closings, security guards, and media presence that are part of the March. She used the word "besieged" twice more in the next 30 seconds in a similar context. She also on more than one occasion started by saying, "From our point of view…" before correcting herself and restating her thoughts as, "From the Polish point of view…"

The main office has never contacted any of the Polish organizations she works with but, "groups of individual coordinators come to us and say, 'our schedule is really tight, the March of the Living is organizing *everything* for us and we've got to follow their schedule from A to Z and we've only got 30 minutes in this city and 45 in this, where can we meet with your group?'" This is much different from the arrangement that Rabbi Meyer described, where regional coordinators, "have almost complete autonomy as group leaders."

Bukowska was firm in her belief that Poles are more willing to speak with Jews than Jews are to speak with Poles. "The impetus has always come from Poles. Once in a while it has come from a local [March coordinator] contacting one of these [Polish] foundations." Later she remarked, "I've never had a case where I've asked a [Polish] school director if they would come and they've said, 'I don't want to meet with any Jews.' They *want* to."

Despite the difficulties in arranging these meetings, Bukowska was able to describe what one might expect, based on the successes she has had. "Sometimes the

[49] Since 1990 trips of Israeli school children have also traveled through Poland in a fashion similar to, though not associated with, the March of the Living. Bukowska has worked with these groups as well as the Marchers and often told stories of these Israeli teenagers throughout our interview. Though not part of the March, these trips are almost identical and face identical problems. I have included her comments about the Israeli groups and, when it was clear from the recording, differentiated between the two.

groups just talk about the price of beer…just let it be normal conversations. It shouldn't be all Shoah stuff. It should be just normal everyday experiences." She gave no indication that there had ever been any friction in any of the events, but she was not clear on the number of encounters she had supervised. From her description, the students would be introduced and then split into small discussion groups where they would, among other things presumably, discuss the price of beer and, "if they had ever gone to class with a hangover."

Apart from her anecdotal experiences, Bukowska was able to provide some historical data about how the March has interacted with Polish groups. "It was not until 1996 that the March of the Living allowed a Polish group to march," she said. "This included not allowing Polish *Jews* to march. I know that when I was on the March in 2001 there was a group of Polish Jews. This group was supposed to be allowed to speak [at the ceremony at Auschwitz] and I remember the girl saying, 'They just told us we're not going to be able to talk,' something about there not being enough time."

Bukowska had much to say about the anti-Semitism that many Marchers, including those interviewed in this paper, claim to have experienced. Apparently, this applies not just to the students, but even the organizers. She spoke of meeting with one group leader[50] who was convinced Poland was filled with anti-Semites. After hearing her say this, Bukowska reports that she thought, "Holy shit, is she seeing something that I am blind to, that I've missed as a sociologist?" The group leader explained that she formed this opinion after seeing that, "[Poles] are wearing German army jackets with the German flag on them." Of course the jackets were not worn by anti-Semites, but rather Poles with both a longing for anything from the West as well as an appreciation for the quality of

[50] An Israeli guide.

army-surplus clothing.[51] If people of authority form such misguided opinions, it is worrisome not only what the students perceive, but also what they are taught.

Bukowska also mentioned the Polish soccer graffiti that had been noticed by several of the participants. She explained the history[52] and remarked that one team, "became known as the Jewish team because some of the athletes were Jewish." She mentioned that she has, on several occasions, seen fans of this ("Jewish") team write graffiti that, in her eyes, glorifies Jews. She saw a sign for the "Judegang"[53] and interpreted it as a signal that fans were, "using it as a badge of honor." Of course much more prevalent is the anti "Jewish" graffiti that certainly appears anti-Semitic to an unfamiliar observer. "So now you see this graffiti. It doesn't mean they're neo-Nazis. It means something," as she paused to laugh before adding, "but not that they're neo-Nazis."

Despite her sympathy for the Polish perspective, she conceded that there are Poles who resent these groups. This was more prevalent in the early years of the March, when Poland was feeling the strain of shock therapy.[54] "At the same, time they see these groups with their jackets and nice, big, warm buses and of course they resented them. Capitalism was supposed to bring Heaven and earth to Poland and it didn't for years." She brought up this economic divide later in the interview. "Imagine someone who just lost their job and sees some tourists come from the West in this closed enclave and they've got this beautiful new clothing."

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[51] I can attest from personal experience that Poland in the wintertime is not particularly hospitable.
[52] For more detail, consult the transcript of this interview located in the appendix.
[53] "Jewish gang"
[54] The name given to the (rapid) economic transition to private ownership and free market adopted by Poland in the early 1990's that, as the name implies, initially led to unemployment and in many cases poverty.

I asked her about how she felt about this "closed enclave" of security that enveloped the Marchers (as well as the Israeli groups). None of the participants expressed any reservations about the number of guards and many responded that they felt the security was necessary. From speaking with Bukowska, it seems that this level of protection is resented by most Poles. "From the Polish point of view, it seems like there's way too much…way too many guys talking up their sleeves, much more than you would need for a trip in Poland."[55] Rhetorically, she asked, "What kind of message is that giving?" The same group leader that had refused to be cooperative with Bukowska's van-full of Polish teenagers also cited security as a reason for not being able to meet.[56] As she mentioned the issue several times, it was clear that, from talking to a person that clearly identifies as Polish, it represents almost an insult to many Poles. It also sends the message to the students that, "you're in danger here," according to Bukowska.

Bukowska also spoke of the frustration these groups can cause to the citizens who find themselves "besieged" twice every year. One year she found herself walking in Krakow and saw a large group of Marchers coming, enclosed by the standard security perimeter, down the sidewalk. It was clear that she would have to move out of their way. "I resented that I had to get off the sidewalk in my country and walk in the street because this group of tourists has came and…I knew that if I tried to plow through them I'd be attacked[57] by the guards for threatening security or serve as an example of Polish anti-Semitism." This last comment is striking, especially with respect to the issue of perception, as mentioned by both Bukowska and Meyer. How does one choose to

[55] This is not an exaggeration; such personnel were present when I went in 2000 and one of the participants spoke of seeing similar agents.
[56] The situation was resolved by Bukowska using her connections to get a "secure" room within the Auschwitz Museum building suitable to the group's needs.
[57] This word was not clear in the recording; it is possible she did not use such a strong word.

perceive an angry-looking Pole "plowing" through a group of Marchers? Paradoxically, it appears that Marchers would be both justified in thinking they had been accosted by a hateful Pole; yet it is clear Bukowska is anything but.

Finally, I asked her whether the March was responsible for manipulating emotions through misleading photographs as discussed earlier in this paper. She did not blame the March, but was quick to recall, "I've had guides almost directly tell me that they were glad that the weather was bad because they needed to have the feeling that it was dark and grey and cold and then you come to Israel where it's sunny and warm."

Despite her frustrations, it appears Bukowska blames the March mostly for insensitivity and ignorance. "Do I think [March organizers] ever tried to think about what the implications were of what they were saying and doing? No." She added, "And I think they should have. They're trying to influence and they know it that they are trying to influence ideologically a huge group of young, impressionable people." She also said they did not "have a conscious intention of it," and they did not, "put a critical eye to it." Despite her attempt to label the March organizers as ignorant and insensitive rather than purposefully manipulative, she did contradict herself several times in the interview when speaking of the cold reception she has received from organizers. Based on her accounts, it is fair to infer that a group leader's unwillingness to make even a minimal effort to work with Bukowska's group(s) is due to a desire *not* to participate in such programs.

One should not read too much from this conclusion. Despite Bukowska's remarks, the March does not appear to be a centralized program. I am inclined to believe Rabbi Meyer when he states he has personal autonomy over what his group does and does not do. Given this, Bukowska's frustrations further support the earlier claim that

flawed group leaders, not a flawed program, are responsible for the lack of dialogue between the two sides. It is not the scope of this paper to assess the number of group leaders categorized as "poor," but I am inclined to believe that, from Bukowska's numerous experiences, in addition to comments made by Goldberg, it is at the least, a sizeable minority.

Even with these problems, Bukowska was unwilling to condemn the March outright. Of all the critics of the program, it is unlikely any have had such close contact with the actual organizers and participants as Bukowska. I never asked her what she *liked* about the program. If I had, it is likely she would have been able to list several components. In our interview, she gave the impression that she thought the program was flawed, but that its imperfections could be addressed.

Conclusions

This paper started by posing the question, "What, if any, impact does The March of the Living have both on how Jews view Polish citizens *and* how Polish citizens view Jews?" The research allows for several observations. The first, and most obvious, is that The March of the Living *does* affect how Jews see Polish citizens. Virtually everyone I spoke with either implied or explicitly stated that the March framed Poland in a negative light. This includes the two group leaders I spoke with: Goldberg and Meyer. One would expect they would argue the March is unbiased in its portrayal, yet they both openly admitted there was a negative bias. Meyer defended this by arguing it is insignificant: the March aims to create Jewish identity, not to foster dialogue between the two groups.

Without making a value judgment, it appears Jewish organizations that help support the March need to decide just what exactly the March *should* teach students. The actual goal of the program is surprisingly ambiguous; all of the students paused to think when I asked them what they thought the message was. Even the brochure fails to explain exactly why the prospective student should go on the trip. Instead, it is filled with factual information about what he will experience if he participates. Intuition leads one to believe that the goal is to give students a stronger sense of Jewish identity. If this is the case, then it appears the program encourages an identity based, at least in part, on themes of victimization and persecution. Again, it is for the Jewish community to decide if the program is sending the right message.

It appears that steps are already being taken to examine the message of the March. A recent article in Haaretz, an Israeli daily paper, spoke of the growing concern as to the message of Polish Holocaust trips. Although the article focused on trips sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Education, the concerns are equally applicable to the March. Doctor Jackie Feldman of Ben-Gurion University who studied the trips, was concerned about the message.

> "Feldman says that the lack of encounters with Poles and the strict security arrangements foster a sense of threat and hatred toward Poles which engenders statements such as, 'Nothing changes. Poles are the same anti-Semites as before.' The lack of encounters with local Jews reinforces the message that the only natural place for Jews to live is Israel, he says" (Barkat).

The fact that such an article is even published reflects the shift in Jewish thinking. Researchers like Feldman appear to have a growing audience. The article mentions joint talks between the Israeli and Polish ministries of education to revise the curriculum used

on the trip—presumably because of critics of the trips. Even if this does not directly effect the March of the Living, it is likely to increase criticism within the Jewish community of the program—especially when a very similar program is labeled as biased by Israeli officials; the second sentence of the article reads, "The Foreign Ministry says that the program's current format harms Israel-Poland relations and fosters alienation and hostility between Israelis and Poles" (Barkat).

Despite the clear evidence of a negative bias, it is not clear how it affected participants. Although Goldberg was convinced her students "hated" Poland, several of those that were surveyed expressed neutral feelings toward Poland and Poles. Two even stated a desire to return to the country. In addition, it is not clear that a negative view of Poland correlates with a negative view of Poles—especially given the enormous popularity of the group's security guard. It is unclear how students reconcile the discrepancy between the country and its people.

This group had meaningful interaction with a Pole, but it appears it is the exception. Most Marchers probably spend their entire time in the country without such interaction. Exposed to nothing but concentration camps for a week, it is not surprising that students feel negatively toward Poland. If they feel this way about the country, then it seems likely they would transfer these feelings to Poles—especially if students are never exposed to them.

From speaking with Poles, it is clear that the stereotype of universal anti-Semitism is no longer valid. It would be wrong to deny its existence, but it is clear that it exists only as a subset—not a part of the popular culture. Most of the Poles I spoke with went to great lengths to insist that they had nothing against Jews. Even the participants

said they saw the Poles waving at them and cheering for them. From their descriptions it is clear this was a surprise to many students—some even explicitly said so. Unfortunately it was a brief instant in the trip competing with the countless ambiguous "sightings" of anti-Semites the students experienced.

Currently the March provides a false picture of Poland. It appears the organizers do so to suit their needs: To build emotion, to contrast with a glorified Israel, or a variety of other motivations. If organizers wish to show a more truthful image, they should consider allowing dialogue and interaction between their students and Poles. From my research it appears there is no impediment to this on the Polish side. Professor Bukowska spoke of the resources and networks of Polish groups that are willing to contribute to this project. More importantly, my interviews with Poles in Oswiecim show this is not simply the goal of academics. Rather, there is popular support for dialogue.

Given that there is both support and resources it is fair to conclude organizers of the March could participate but *choose* not to support such programs. This is further confirmed by Bukowska's anecdotal evidence of the numerous times she was rebuffed by March organizers and group leaders.

The March has a great potential to foster dialogue between Poles and Jews. It is rare to find international programs of such magnitude: The March of the Living transports *thousands* of high school students simultaneously across continents. It is up to the program organizers—and the many sponsors—to decide what message to send to students. From my research, it is clear that the current program sends one that is negatively biased against Poland and probably Poles as well. So long as there is desire, there is no reason this message cannot be changed.

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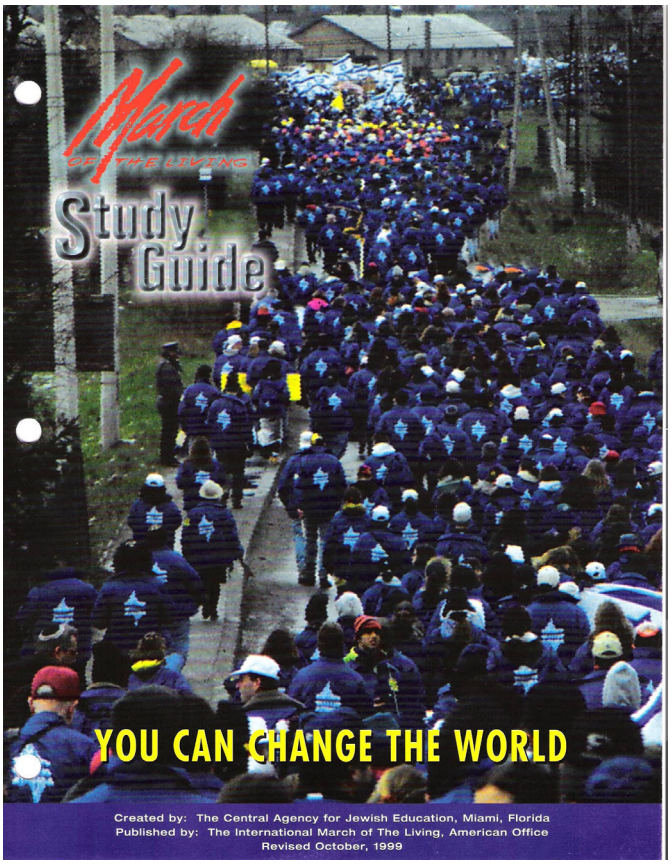
Orla-Bukowska, Annamaria. Personal interview. 15 Dec. 2004.

Rudavsky, Tamar. Personal interview. 6 Jan. 2005.

Appendix

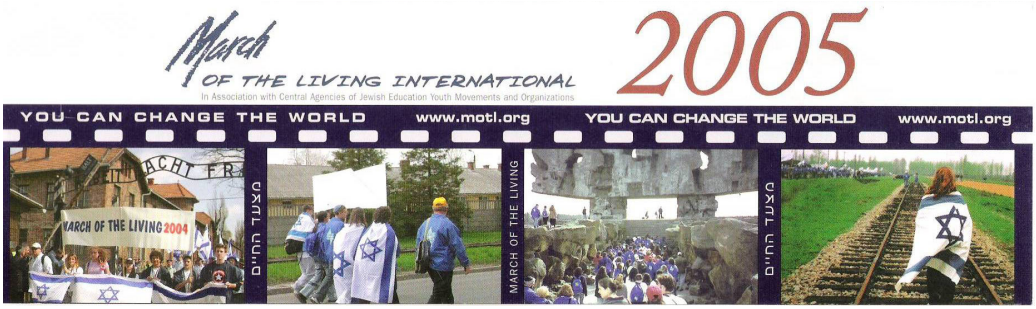
Publicity Materials used by March of the Living

2005 Brochure



2000 Study Guide

Additional Pictures of Poland and Israel included in the 2005 Brochure:



Interview with Ruth Goldberg

When did you go and why?

I went in 2004, and 2002.

I was asked by Federation. My son did it. I was interested in Holocaust education. You need to understand what happened before to understand Israeli Society. My mother was from Poland and I lost a large number of family members.

What is the message of the March?

Depends on the leader. If you have a leader that promotes hatred, then the message can be a message of hatred. That the Poles are murderers and we shouldn't talk with them and shouldn't do anything with them and they are still our enemy. If that's the message then that's what the students are going to come away with. If the leader is talking about we need to remember without hatred. We need to remember and move forward to create normality…The group is very vulnerable and the leader can do a lot and it really depends on the leader. The speeches at Birkenau are speeches of hope. They are not speeches of hatred.

Have you ever seen leaders promote hatred?

I have seen that (leaders speaking with hatred) repeated several times.

What kind of anti-Semitism did you experience?

I was attacked by a Polish woman. I was attacked by a woman my age, maybe a bit older. When students have seen that, then…
It was on an optional tour of Warsaw in a main drag in the early afternoon.

This year our security guard was attacked. He was a Polish guard. They thought he was one of us. It's hard for the kids not to respond in a feeling of (when you take the history) and apply it against all of them.

How did you deal with it after if happened?

It made me angry. I was very very angry. On the other hand, I understand the jealousy, I understand what they're going through when they see the message of us in our blue jackets.

What kinds of reactions did you get from polish citizens?

Poland is a land of rich culture and history. And he hopes we can continue with our friendship. (the guard)

I've seen wonderful people and people who are not so wonderful.

We had very little contact with service people. They were pretty abrupt. But on the other hand when you have hundreds of teenagers it can be difficult. They tried to be decent.

Is there a change in attitude when students get to Israel?

O yeah. They get down on their knees and kiss the ground. They felt they were free. They felt they were imprisoned in Poland. It could be that some of the leaders promoted it.

Did you go anywhere in Poland that was not related to the Shoah?

We went to see Pitowski's palace. We went to Warsaw twice which was optional. The guides tried to show us things but the students really weren't interested in seeing it.

How many students went on the optional trips?

Very few. Some did but it was few. It could be that they were very tired. (for optional trips)

What kind of feelings did the students have toward Poland?

O yeah. Before the trip I did not know. I did train them but they did not know what to do with that. Afterwards, afterwards they said they hated the Poles, they hated Poland. Now they were told not to spend the money in Poland but to spend the money in Israel. Not that you had to, but let's leave the money to Israel and not to Poland. They left Poland not liking it, hating it.

How did their reactions make you feel?

(hesitates) We need to work again on remembering with not hating. Remembering and trying to create communication. The Poles did try. When we went to dinner one night each child received a booklet about (Korchuck) and his history and we are sharing a common hero. We didn't meet their students, there was no place to meet them. We did see them on the March, groups of non-Jews, but we did not have any communication.

Should the March promote programs that encourage dialogue between Poles and Jews?

Probably. I'm not sure the March itself is the place. We met with a woman who was put as a baby outside of the ghetto wall. She just found out now she is a Jew as a 50 year old woman. You hear stories about wonderful Poles that are not Jews and are dealing with that better than what we are dealing with it.

Do you think the students are too young?

You know our students were able to handle it. If you guide them I think they can handle it. That's my feeling, it really is the training of the group leader and the message.

Do you think the March fosters a Holocaust-based identity?

If you celebrate what was before, then it doesn't have to be Holocaust. You are there to celebrate and go to the Warsaw cemetery or to go to Krakow and celebrate the life of that was there. It is part of our history. We celebrate the life that was there know what happened. And you do what you can to move on. Some might move to hatred, some might decide to become an Israeli ambassador to Poland. It depends how you take it.

Interview with Rabbi Arthur Meyer

How long have you been involved?

Been part of MOTL for 14 years.

What led you to be involved?

Person who used to run the March was no longer up to it (it is physically demanding) so I took over for him.

Had you ever been to Poland before?

No, the first time I went was actually the last time this gentleman ran it.

Have you noticed any changes in the students?

Nothing appreciable.

Have you noticed a change in the message of the March?

They've sharpened the message. The message has always been from destruction to rebirth. There has been a greater growth of Jewish life in Poland. When we first started going there was nothing there.

What kind of anti-Semitism did you experience?

We've had a couple cases. (Marchers getting knocked down, etc.)

Has there been any change in security?

It's still very tight. Whether it's necessary or not, it's better to have it.

Me: one of the groups reported getting hit by a car.

Rabbi: unaware of incident. It may have been perception. There are some people who imagine there are anti-Semitic people around every corner. Sometimes when you're looking for some Anti-Semitism you interpret everything that comes up that could be purely accidental as intentional.

Do you feel the March creates a Holocaust-based sense of Jewish identity?

That's a classic criticism of the March and it depends on how you focus the trip. Part of the trip is also to understand the depth and breadth of Jewish life that existed pre-Holocaust. On the other hand, if the whole focus is "here are dead Jews, here are dead Jews, here are dead Jews…" then yes (trails off)

How is the March organized? Do you have discretion as to what your group does or do you follow a schedule planned by the central office?

We have almost complete autonomy as group leaders [to program how we wish].

Do you feel the students are mature enough to handle the March?

I don't know what the problem is with being impressionable when you're educating.

Have you had any interactions with Polish teenagers?

We have not, we have had interactions with Jewish Polish teenagers. Honestly, my goal of the trip is not to deal with the question of tolerance. My goal of the trip is to deal with the Jewish experience. If I were focusing more on the Holocaust I would probably deal more with these Polish teenagers.

Is it a concern that participants walk away with the feeling that Poland is anti-Semitic?

It is totally up to the group leader. If you know that all three major malls in Warsaw are owned by Israelis. And you know that the amount of trade between Israel and Poland is extraordinary, then you know it's not an anti-Semitic *country* of people.

What role does the group leader play in shaping this?

It's entirely up to the leader.

Do you feel like it's worthwhile to meet with Poles?

I think a lot of things are worthwhile, but I don't think it should be the focus of the March. The focus of the March should be that "this is what Jewish life once was like, this is how precarious our history has been."

In terms of current Polish Jewish relations, we don't need to deal with a lot of those issues. But they should understand that not every German, not every Pole was a Nazi or a collaborator and on the other hand not every Jew was righteous.

Interview with Professor Tamar Rudavsky

What made you uncomfortable about the March?

All I know about MOTL is it is geared around concentration camps….I don't understand the point. I know there is a historical (aspect)…I think it harbors more animosity and hatred of the other.

I know some people have to (see these sites).

I think it's a certain voyeurism .

How do you think the March affects participants' senses of Jewish Identity?

I think it's awful. I think Jewish identity should be based on 2 weeks in Israel, not in the camps. It should not be based on "don't forget what they did to us."

It's not that I want to forget it or want to deny what happened. "I think we blow it out of proportion."

I don't think we've learned (the lesson of the Holocaust).

Is there any way to salvage this type of program?

I do not think 15 16 year olds are emotionally, intellectually ready to deal with the Holocaust.

It should be done in the context of other cultures (and I suspect that will never happen). So it's not just the world hating the Jews but it's others.

Part of what bothers me is that reinforces this view of Jewish history. Good Jews being attacked by bad guys.

It's basically for Jewish kids to come to terms with what was done to their people.

Interview with Professor Annamaria Orla-Bukowska

What changes have you noticed with the March?

It seems to me that there's…a lot more stress on security (i.e.: that you're in danger here). While they know they're in danger in their own country, they have an extremely strong sense that they're in danger outside. That they're a lot of anti-Semites out there. That as soon as you leave the border of Israel, anti-Semites are out around every corner ready to attack you. Wear a baseball cap instead of a yarmulke. Don't wear anything with Hebrew or speak Hebrew.

Do you think the organizers of the March intentionally try to portray Poland as a place of misery?

I don't think they had a conscious intention of it. I think that just in the same way as the average Pole in the street [has certain politically incorrect stereotypes] the same as if you ask an American about Poles they give you the same stereotypes. I don't think they ever put a critical eye to it. They never thought what they said about Poles was as stereotypical as things Polish Christians might say about Jews. Do I think they ever tried to think about what the implications of what they were saying and doing were ? No. And I think they should have. They're trying to influence and they know it that they are trying to influence ideologically a huge group of young, impressionable people.

[Security] is a big thing. From our (corrects self and says "Polish") point of view it seems like there's way too much…way too many guys talking up their sleeves. Much more than you think you would need for a trip in Poland. And I've seen security say "no you can't go see the woman who saved your grandmother because it's dangerous." What kind of message is that giving?

I've had guides almost directly tell me that they were glad that the weather was bad because they needed to have the feeling that it was dark and grey and cold and you come to Israel where it's sunny and warm.

Has the March ever contacted you about joint programming?

To my knowledge the March of the Living organization per se never approached foundations that are always willing to help organize meetings between MOTL groups with peers here in Poland. We have been able to organize these things but the impetus has always come because *we* accidentally met somebody who said they would come with a group and we asked for them to come meet with us.

The impetus has always come from Poles. Once in a while it's come from a local (MOTL) coordinator contacting one of these (Polish) foundations.

Not only has the MOTL not contacted us, but groups of individual coordinators come up to us and say our schedule is really tight, the MOTL is organizing *everything* for us and we've got to follow their schedule from A to Z and we've only got 30 minutes in this city and 45 in this, where can we meet with your group?

Very clear that she is desperate for these groups to interact.

I've never had a case where I've asked a (Polish) school director if they would come and they've said "I don't want to meet with any Jews." They *want* to.

Story of personally paying for a van to bring Polish kids to meet with Jewish kids at Auschwitz. Jewish guide said there was no secure place for them to meet. Used connections to get a room at the museum so she had to agree.

I don't want to over-exaggerate but, to my knowledge, the MOTL organization has not contacted us in advance asking to meet with these organizations.

Sometimes the groups just talk about the price of beer…just let it be normal conversations. It shouldn't be all Shoah stuff. It should be just normal everyday experiences.

In Israel people talk about these trips as "Trips to Poland." They're not Shoah trips, that's not what they're called. they're called trip to Poland. The whole stereotype is that it's all Poland. It's all Poland's fault, somebody's got to be blamed.

I think the first trip did not hire any Polish guides and guards.

I resented the fact that I had to get off the sidewalk in my country and walk in the street because this group of tourists has come and…you know. And I knew that if I tried to plow through them I'd be attacked by the guards for threatening security or serve as an example of Polish anti-Semitism.

She said something that made my jaw drop. "I was so shocked, I've seen a lot of new-Nazis here." And I looked at her and I thought, "Holy shit, is she seeing something that I am blind to, that I've missed as a sociologist? I asked if they were wearing Nazi pins in their lapels or something. She said, "No, they're wearing German army jackets with the German flag on them. Explanation: anything from the west was worshipped. And people bought them because they were good quality and they were from the west. "And she thought that because kids were wearing German army surplus jackets that they were neo-Nazis here." I can understand someone misunderstanding the graffiti.

Saw "Judegang" found in pro-Krakovia graffiti. They were using it as a badge of honor. I think we should paint over all that graffiti.

Several students mentioned seeing the soccer graffiti. Do you feel it is anti-Semitic?

Wiswa was owned by the National Guard before the war. They had an Aryan clause: no minority athletes. Who did it hurt the most? The Jewish athletes. So since Wiswa had an Aryan clause, minority athletes played for Krakovia. Krakovia became known as the "Jewish" team because some of the athletes were Jewish.

So now you see this graffiti. It doesn't mean they're neo-Nazis, it means something (laughs) but not that they're neo-Nazis.

It was not until 1996 that the March of the Living allowed a Polish group to march. This included not allowing Polish *Jews* to march. I know that when I was on the March in 2001 there was a group of Polish Jews. This group was supposed to be allowed to speak (at the ceremony) and I remember the girl saying, "they just told us we're not going to be able to talk; something about not there not being enough time with all the ministers speaking and what not."

How did Poles react to the March when it first started?

There was a lot of resentment.

Spoke about the first March and how Poles were beginning to suffer from Shock Therapy and, "at the same time they see these groups with their jackets and nice, big, warm heated buses and of course they resented them. Capitalism was supposed to bring Heaven and earth to Poland and it didn't for years."

There was a lot of tension. Imagine someone who just lost their job and sees some tourists come from the West in this closed enclave and they've got this beautiful new clothing. What Poles didn't realize is that many of these kids were coming from poor communities and the trips were heavily subsidized. But the Poles don't see this, all they see is the nice, new clothing.

Keep in mind that the Poles are besieged not just for the March of the Living but also for the Israeli trips. So it's like Fall and Spring they're besieged. Holocaust Season? Yup. The season is actually extending. (said besieged again later in conversation)

This definitely should be done. Confronting the two sides: Polish and Jewish. This is something that needs writing about. The fact that I've met (three of you) that have reservations is a good sign, uncritically a very good sign. How many kids (are like you)? That might be sad.

Participant Interview: Kevin

How did you get involved?

Involved through Columbus Torah Academy.

Was there anything about the trip that made you want to participate?

Well I wanted to experience the death camps firsthand because through books it never got to me. I thought that by going on this I could have a connection with the past.

Do you remember getting the study guide?

Don't remember the study guide.

What were your expectations?

I thought it would be this really serious program where if you made one out of place comment it would be the end of the world. But it really wasn't like that. It was really social and not a lot of people were serious about it. It made it a lot harder for me to take it seriously. (sounded frustrated)

Did anyone else in the group seem to share your frustration?

I think a lot of other people felt it wasn't as serious. A lot of people said they would cry and everything but they never did, so it probably wasn't as serious and impactful [sic] as they thought it would be.

Is anyone to blame for this atmosphere?

I think when you get 6,000 kids together it's going to be a social atmosphere. I didn't realize that until afterward, but I don't think it's anything the organizers can really prevent.

Would you want to go back to Poland?

I wouldn't mind going back to Poland. I liked Warsaw a lot. I wouldn't plan a trip around going there but if I had an opportunity I would want to go back.

Would you want to see any of the Holocaust sites?

Yes, it's something you have to see, you can't avoid it when you're there. I would go back to Auschwitz and the camps we didn't see.

Did you see any anti-Semitism while you were there?

Not really, I don't remember any anti-Semitism.

Did that surprise you at all?

Yes it did. I remember hearing from part participants that there is anti-Semitism everywhere. Especially on the March itself, that there would be people lined up cursing at them. But for us, there was nobody, not even on the March itself. All there was was a little group of kids cheering us on waiving an Israeli flag someone had given them.

Did other people in the group seem surprised that there wasn't anti-Semitism?

I think so, I think a lot of people were surprised. I mean, I was sort of looking forward to having all those anti-Semites, so we could show them that 'we're here.'
Did you feel disappointed that those people weren't there?

In a way I did. It's weird to say that but you want to show them that 'we're still here.'

Did the group leaders give the impression (before you left) hint that there might be anti-Semitism or was it mostly from the past participants?

It was mainly from past-participants but I think maybe a little bit, they told us there would be some.

What did you think of the security?

I thought it was very good, I thought they handled it very well. Our security guard was awesome.

Did you ever have a chance to talk to normal Poles?

No I did not.

Would you have wanted?

I think I would have, yeah. Especially someone who was alive during the Holocaust.

Would you be interested in talking to Polish teenagers?

(pauses) Not as much as someone who lived through the Holocaust, but it might be interesting to see what they think about the whole thing.

Did you notice any strange reactions from group members?

A couple people went thinking that it *was* a social trip. And I was sort of annoyed by that.

Would you recommend this trip?

I think I would. It's something you have to experience firsthand. Even if it's a little social, it's something you have to see.

How did the group leaders portray Poles in respect to collaboration?

I thought it was very negative. They made it seem like they were at fault for the whole thing even though the Nazis were. They were next to the camps and might have been able to do something but under the circumstances I don't see how they could of.

Did the guides at Auschwitz mention how Poles see Auschwitz as a symbol of Polish suffering?

They mentioned it was for political prisoners and showed us the shooting blocks where they were executed.

What did you think of the actual March?

I was surprised, I was expecting it to be different.

Would you make any changes to the program?

I don't think there are any changes that can be made.

What do you think the message or goal is of the March?

(pauses) I think it's to counter the Holocaust doubters and it's good to let Jewish people see this firsthand so they know it's not fake, it really happened.

Do you feel more Jewish?

I don't think so, I thought I would be a little changed but I really wasn't.

Did that surprise you?

I don't think so. I never thought I was going to cry (I did not).

Participant Interview: Isaac

How did you get involved?

I went through my AZA group. (BBYO)

My mom knew about it, her father is a survivor. She knew about it and encouraged me to go whether it was with a group or not. Three people from my town went, so it was a small group.

Do you remember the study guide?

Yes I do. I did not read it.

What were your expectations?

I was a sophomore in high school at the time. I didn't expect myself to be quite as unprepared. I thought I could handle things more than I could. It was more emotional than I thought it would be. I was also taken aback by reactions of other people in the group. (Fainting, etc.)

I went with the Northern Ohio Group

Had you been to Poland before?

No.

What were your impressions of Poland when you were there?

Well, Poland is not unlike suburban Ohio. Rolling hills sort of thing. Obviously it's a deep-immersion program. It's a pretty stark place.

Do you feel what you saw was representative of Poland?

Well, we didn't see the night-life or any of the cultural aspects, but the country makes no secrets of its past, it is what it is.

Would you ever want to go back?

I'd like to spend more time in Warsaw or in the cities, Krakow was nice.

Did you notice any anti-Semitism while you were there?

Yeah actually. When we were in Majdonek some punks started harassing the group leaders. The security guard showed them the butt of his gun from his coat pocket and that ended that pretty quick.

They warned us about the smaller towns, but we didn't see much of it.

Did that surprise you?

No.

How did you feel about the security?

I felt they were doing the best they could to protect the liability issues of the March.

Did you ever get to talk to regular Poles?

I talked to one couple on the train in broken English for a little time.

Would you want to talk to teens?

It would be a good opportunity, it would have been interesting but at the time I didn't think about it.

How did other people react?

One girl refused to talk for a few days.

Did anyone seem to hate the trip?

(pause) There was one kid who didn't bond with anyone and for him it must have been pretty rough.

Would you recommend this trip to other people?

Absolutely.

How do you think the March portrays Poles?

Extremely negative except for the partisans. But they were portrayed in a negative light, probably for good reason.

So you agree with their interpretation?

Yeah, probably pretty accurate.

They warned us to be aware of anti-Semitism in the older population who still remember it and the skinhead punks and whatever.

What do you think of the actual March?

Heavy. It was certainly a unique thing, I don't think there's anything quite like it.

Did you feel people took it seriously?

There were a couple people there who I thought were there for the Israel part, but for the most part I had a pretty somber bus.

Would you make any changes?

(jokes about food) [suggestions about Israel portion].

What is the goal of the March?

The tagline is "remembrance." We live with the very last of the survivors. I think the idea is a step beyond classroom learning. It's presenting in a very real sense. You could feel what happened.

Did you feel like more of a Jew?

I have a lot of family in Israel. The Polish part helped me connect with my grandfather's side of the family?

How did your grandfather feel about the trip?

I saw him briefly because we don't speak the same language. So I brought him a couple Polish newspapers and through my uncle he expressed that he was glad that I'd been to where I'd been. I saw a memorial to his village at Treblinka.

Participant Interview: Ben

(responses were typed by Participant, grammar and spelling have not been corrected)

How did you end up getting involved?

The school I go to offers going on the trip to 11th and 12th graders every other year.

Did you read the study guide? (what did you think of it?)

I'm pretty sure they didn't give us a study guide. We just had classes.

What were your expectations of the trip? (did it meet them?)

I thought it was going to be an emotional and serious trip and life changing. It was pretty emotional and serious. But I think it could have been more so, the group I was with wasn't exactly the best in the world). It personally has not changed my life. However, that may be b/c I had no relatives in the Holocaust and b/c I have had many deaths on a personal level.

Had you ever been to Poland before?

No.

Would you ever want to go back?

Only to see the camps, ghettoes, and such.

What, if any, sorts of anti-Semitic things did you observe?

Not much, except for maybe 2 or two swastikas.

What was the security like? Did you feel there was not enough/too much?

I felt secure. I did not see that many security people, but others claimed they were all over the place trying to blend in.

Did you get any chance to talk to normal Poles/did you want to?

No, if others did, it was briefly. I don't think I wanted to, unless I could have found a Pole who wasn't anti-Semitic.

How did other members of the group react? (Anything abnormal?)

They all reacted upset, some more than others. There was maybe some joking on the bus, but unless u consider that abnormal, then I didn't see anything abnormal reactions.

Would you recommend this trip to others?

Yes.

Did group leaders portray Poles in a positive, negative, or neutral light in respect to involvement in the Shoah?

I think they portrayed them in a slightly negative light. They did mention that there were a few who tried to help, but they talked about how many of them just watched or encouraged the Shoah.

What was the actual March like? What sort of atmosphere was there when the leaders spoke at Birkenau?

The March was amazing. It was awesome to see so many people walking, but I think it could have been more amazing if everyone had their coats on, but it was a warm day, which seemed…somewhat wrong, b/c it doesn't seem right that the sun could shine in a place where so much death and despair was located. Yet it seems right b/c it shows that life goes on. Nevertheless, I still wish the weather were harsher, b/c I wanted to experience it more like it really was and see the ocean of blue. The atmosphere when the leaders spoke at Birkenau was somewhat restless. Especially for those of us who did not understand Hebrew very well, since the whole speech was in Hebrew.

What, if any, changes would you make to the program?

I would spend less time shopping in Israel and less time in the sister cities.

What do you think the overall message (or goal) of the March is? Do you agree with it?

I think the overall goal is to make sure that the Shoah is not forgotten and to make sure that this never happens again. I agree with this goal.

Has the March made you feel like more of a Jew?

Yes.

What was the age composition of your group? (mostly seniors, juniors, etc)

Mostly seniors and juniors

Participant Interview: Apryl

(responses were typed by Participant, grammar and spelling have not been corrected)

How did you end up getting involved?

I heard about it when I attended middle school at CTA. The seniors who had just gone on it came back and showed us pictures and talked to us about the trip and I really wanted to go and continued hearing about it until the time came for me to actualy sign up.

What were your expectations of the trip? (did it meet them?)

I expected the trip to be very sad and depressing, but also enlightening and educational. It definatly did meet my expectations, it was a great program. In the midst of getting ready for the program I didn't realize all of the new ppl and friends I would meet bc of it.

Would you ever want to go back to Poland?

Maybe, if for a program like this again, but it is not my ideal vacation place.

What, if any, sorts of anti-Semitic things did you observe?

Some of the Polish people seemed to know who we were and why we were there but basically ignored us. But then there was the instance with Tomek, our security guard, where someone thought he was a Jew and tried to hurt him with their car. I also noticed that when we were driving by in smaller towns, someone made a heil hitler salute.

What was the security like? Did you feel there was not enough/too much?

I felt safe. Tomek was there, and he was friendly and I felt safe with him there(I think he carried a gun although I don't remember for sure). We were also told that there were thousands of undercover agents around us all the time making sure that everything went smoothly, especially on the march itself.

Did you get any chance to talk to normal Poles/did you want to?

Yes, on the street some of them were doing advertising and when they recognized that we were foreign after we didn't know how to speak Polish, they were very friendly. Our bus driver was nice, and other than that I don't remember.

How did other members of the group react? (Anything abnormal?)

No, they reacted like one should…

Would you recommend this trip to others?

With out a doubt, definatly. I had such a great and impacting time..

Did group leaders portray Poles in a positive, negative, or neutral light in respect to involvement in the Shoah?

The group leaders tried to portray them as nuetral as possilbe. When we were learning about the Holocaust before the actual trip we did learn, however, that a lot of them did not do anything to help the Jews, and they took advantage of their absence.

What was the actual March like? What sort of atmosphere was there when the leaders spoke at Birkenau?

It was a very intense atmosphere, the march itself was solemn, yet amazing to see the sites and all of Jews and people around. But then again, it depended where in the crowd you were, there might hve been a few people off to the side not into the speakers.

What, if any, changes would you make to the program?

I cant think of any, It was great program. Maybe there coiuld be some sistering up with different countries, so we can learn more about other jews form those places intstead of seeing them here or there, because getting that chance is so rare. Oh and definitely more time in israel.

What do you think the overall message (or goal) of the March is? Do you agree with it?

To educate people about the Holocause by showing them the sites firsthand, and showin Jews a real piece of their ancestral history. As Jewish americans (american jews?), these historical sites really hit deep centers of our heart and our roots, and its only once in a lifetime that a person can actualy go there and see it and be able to spread the knowledge of it.

Has the March made you feel like more of a Jew?

Yes, there I are time swhen I have to remind myself, remember poland, people died for your relgion! Thast when I try and be a "better" jew, or at least more aware and a better person. I also feel mmore connected with my Grandparents, who are holocaust survivors, and they know that ive been there and thought about them and my relatives who perished there.

Participant Interview: Rachel

How did you end up getting involved?

Through CTA.

Did you read the study guide? (what did you think of it?)

No. I don't remember getting one.

What were your expectations of the trip? (did it meet them?)

I thought it would be very heavy.

Had you ever been to Poland before?

No.

Would you ever want to go back?

Probably not, I did not feel very welcome.

What, if any, sorts of anti-Semitic things did you observe?

There were people picnicking and walking their dogs in the camps and there were beer bottles. It was pretty obvious that they did not want us there.

What was the security like? Did you feel there was not enough/too much?

Pretty good. I had heard from other people who had been on the March that people would yell and shout at us. But they held up Israeli flags and waved flags behind us. That was really the first time we felt like they didn't want us to go home.

Did you get any chance to talk to normal Poles/did you want to?

No. Yeah, I would have loved to.

How did other members of the group react? (Anything abnormal?)

I don't think so. I remember not seeing people upset in Auschwitz. But everyone reacts in different ways.

Would you recommend this trip to others?

Definitely. Some people felt the rules were not tight enough (kosher stuff).

Did group leaders portray Poles in a positive, negative, or neutral light in respect to involvement in the Shoah?

I think it was pretty neutral. (something about people in the group talking about not buying German stuff)

What was the actual March like? What sort of atmosphere was there when the leaders spoke at Birkenau?

It was very hot. People were talking, they were laughing, they were very happy. I kind of felt bad about not being upset but then it was about living on. It helped that there were the polish people on the side cheering us on.
It was almost like a party.

What, if any, changes would you make to the program?

Be nicer to the survivors on the plane…

What do you think the overall message (or goal) of the March is? Do you agree with it?

It's more of a learning experience. You learn about it in school. To be able to remember what happened.

Has the March made you feel like more of a Jew?

I felt more connected to people.

Extra Comments:

I think they try to build you up and tell you how emotional you're going to be and I think they need to not do that.

Polish Resident Respondent: young male

Note: because of a lot of background street noise, the other questions and responses were inaudible.

Do you know any Jewish people?

No, not me, but my friends know some. Because of this {concentration} camp here, all we have is problems. For example, near the museum, there is place where the Jews had a warehouse during the war. Recently, it was made into a disco club, but the Jews wanted to use it for their mementos (?), so we couldn't use it for fun. My friend witnessed when Jewish visitors were amazed that Oswiecim residents walk on the streets smiling. They think that it's incomprehensible in a place where so many people perished. So what are we all supposed to do, bow our heads and cry?

Has your friend had any interaction with these groups?

No, not really. In general, we have split opinions about the Jews. So they have this camp site, but why? It only brings conflicts. For example, after they got deported, the Poles renovated the buildings, and they are coming back and demanding their properties. Another example is the Jewish cemetery and the apartment building next to it. I understand that the cemetery is a sacred site, but what to do now, demolish the building?

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

When I was still in school, we took a trip to the [concentration] camp. That place is as common for us as the Wawel Castle.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

No, I'm not interested. That's their tradition; same way as we have our holidays, they have theirs.

Polish Resident Respondent: female

How long have you lived [here]?

40 years already.

Do you know any Jewish people?

I had known an older lady, but I don't remember her name because it was a long time ago.

So your only contact was with that person?

Only with her; she was very nice and courteous; we just talked very friendly, so I don't have any prejudice towards the Jews, because I never experienced any … (inaudible) from them. And my contact with them while I was working was very good.

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year?

Oh, no, I'm just not familiar. I live here in the housing development and I only pass through here to … (inaudible) supermarket, I'm not pronouncing it right. So here's also a Jewish cemetery , so I quite often see pilgrim groups, that is in my understanding. They rather not allow us into their cemetery, maybe because of that, I don't know, vandalism?

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

Quite often, when family comes to visit. When we first moved here, as young people right after marriage, it was very often, because of family and friends' visits. And that was an opportunity to show our … (inaudible). For example, we have a church in our housing development, St. Maximilian, and that is sort of an offering to the people who perished. There is a plague with a list of countries. We pray at Easter and Christmas and have pilgrimages to the museum.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

A lot of young people, but also my age. It seems to me, but I'm not here that much… (inaudible), but it's always more participants.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

I don't know the languages, and I'm 70-plus years old.

Polish Resident Respondent: male

Do you know any Jewish people?

I have a friend who lives in Japan, and we correspond and chat via … (inaudible), that way.

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year?

Many, many. As it happens, I am a traffic control officer and I have the pleasure to direct the groups, whether the March of the Living, or other occasions.

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

All the time, of course.

What is your reaction to these groups?

Very positive.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

Very often, understandingly, because it's related to my job.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

Only that the groups are bigger every year.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?
Of course I have contact, because there are always some citizens and there are always some arrangements that have to be made.

So your reaction is rather positive?

A: Yes, yes, of course. I don't have anything against.

Polish Resident Respondent: young male

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year?

It's hard for me to tel. I can't answer that. A lot, I guess.

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

Not personally, because I don't know anybody, only by sight.

What is your reaction to these groups?

I have nothing against the Jews. Rather positive.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

Two times.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

I don't have an opinion, because it's only been one time.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

Sure, why not. I'd like to talk to them.

Polish Resident Respondent: female

How long have you lived [here]?

Five years.

Do you know any Jewish people?

No.

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year

It seems to me, a small number.

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

No, no, no.

What is your reaction to these groups?

I think that (pause), as a human being, now it's not all (inaudible), as they say.

So, is it positive?

Oh, yes, yes.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

O Jesus and Mary, maybe eight or nine times.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

(Inaudible) just that more and more people participate in the march.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

Yes, why not, yes, yes.

Polish Resident Respondent: female

How long have you lived [here]?

Four years.

Do you know any Jewish people?

No.

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

No.

What is your reaction to these groups?

I'm positive towards them.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

Three.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

Not really.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

If given the opportunity, yes.

Polish Resident Respondent: female

How long have you lived [here]?

Fifteen maybe, not from birth.

Do you know any Jewish people?

(Inaudible), no.

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year?

I mean, I don't know, I'm not familiar.

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

That is with Jews, I don't know, maybe I have, when something (inaudible), I don't know.

And with these groups?

No, no.

What is your reaction to these groups?

To these groups? If (inaudible), but in general, I have nothing against them, no.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

Twice.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

No, no.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

I would. (inaudible)

Polish Resident Respondent: male

How long have you lived [here]?

About 3 years.

Do you know any Jewish people?

I don't, but my mother did, before the war, when she was still alive, she knew some then. They had some small shops and such.

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year?

A lot; they show it on TV. (inaudible)

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

No.

What is your reaction to these groups?

It's OK; I never had any (inaudible) to anybody, so it's positive.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

About five times.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

Last year they didn't have it, but I knew it, you know? It was here at the camp. I think it's more and more [people].

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

Maybe if there is time, you know? But it's hard, we would have to meet first, and so on.

Polish Resident Respondent: male

How long have you lived [here]?

I just work here; it will be nearly two years. I live in the Silesia, in Lazisko Gorne, about 40 years.

Do you know any Jewish people?

No

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year?

I'm just now familiar, I don't know, I can't tell.

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

No.

What is your reaction to these groups?

None. I mean, how can I explain…It's (inaudible). Jews are such people (inaudible).

So, it's negative?

Yes.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

Once.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

Not so much.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

Not really.

Polish Resident Respondent: female

How long have you lived [here]?

Since birth, fifty five years.

Do you know any Jewish people?

Actually, I knew some, but they are already deceased, I don't remember any names, but yes.

How many Jewish/Israeli organized groups visit this site on average per year?

Yes, they always visit for sure. Quite many.

Have you had any interaction with these groups?

Actually, no. When I was at the cemetery recently, the Jewish cemetery happened to be open, because it's usually closed. But it's being renovated, so the gate was open, and we lit candles, so that was it.

What is your reaction to these groups?

Pardon, sir. For me, it's all the same, whether it's a Jew or Pole. So positive, of course.

How many times have you visited Auschwitz?

In my lifetime, I have been there often. But, for me, it's a great shock, when I go there, great distress. So, in the last maybe ten years, I have not gone.
But because I have family dispersed all over Poland, then when they come, they always want to visit Auschwitz and the camp.

Have you noticed any change in the March of the Living groups over the last several years?

I have never been to the March of the Living.

If given the opportunity, would you want to interact with these students?

No problem, gladly of course, no problem.